

THE
SONIC
SCREWDRIVER

NO. 4

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THE SONIC SCREWDRIVER is intended solely for the enjoyment of fans of British media fantasy and science fiction. Submissions and letters of comment are both encouraged and welcomed. Correspondence requiring a reply should be accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope. All correspondence will be considered for publication unless clearly noted otherwise. All submissions and correspondence should be addressed to THE SONIC SCREWDRIVER, c/o OSIRIS Publications, 8928 North Olcott Avenue, Morton Grove, Illinois 60053.

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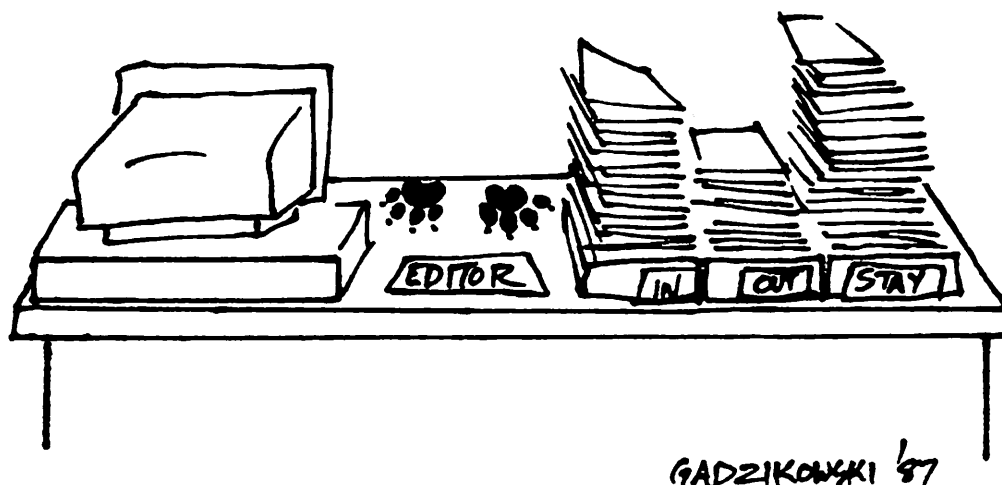
INTRODUCING...

THE

PANASONIC

SCREWDRIVER





FROM THE WOLF/78/82M EDITOR'S DESK: A Busy Season...

Those of you who know us personally are already aware that one of the causes dearest to us is that of the timber wolf, sometimes called the grey wolf. For several years now, we have been actively involved with the Timber Wolf Preservation Society, a Wisconsin-based organisation devoted to this beautiful, proud, and much-maligned predator. We have come to know each of the Society's seventeen adult wolves quite well, from three-year-old MissFit with her eagerly wagging tail and welcoming tongue to sixteen-year-old Germaine, with her quietly aging dignity, from growing and enthusiastic three-year-old Rud to big, sedate, and incredibly shy nine-year-old Max, from small and cuddly-looking eleven-year-old Marcus to elegant, reserved ten-year-old Cinnamon. We've watched young wolf pups grow to adults, and mourned the passing of Caesar and Cleo, the founders of the pack. And most recently, we've helped to raise a near-record litter of nine (!) puppies, born to our much-loved (if somewhat vain) eight-year-old Bolter and his three-year-old life-mate Tokata last April 29th. Three of these pups -- Waterloo and her brothers Frosty and No-Name -- will become permanent residents at the TWPS "wolf farm."

Still somewhat numb from the surprise of all those youngsters, still more than a little worn out from the work involved in feeding and caring for them, and still a bit speechless following the news of our first major award nomination -- for best fanzine design in British media, from Scorpio VI -- we are turning these next few pages over to some of our readers, who have taken the time to write and tell us what they think of THE SONIC SCREWDRIER.

Our sincere thanks to all of you for your support, and for your faith in our talents and abilities. We hope you will enjoy THE SONIC SCREWDRIER #4 as much as you have enjoyed our fanzine offerings in the past, and we wish you hours of reading pleasure in our many and varied worlds.

---Joy Harrison
Managing Editor

LETTERS OF COMMENT

From Barbara Mater of Newark, New Jersey:

THE SONIC SCREWDRIVER is, incredibly, getting better with every issue -- It always looked real good. The beautiful art that Karen [River] did was a real treat, although I felt Joan [hanke-woods] did a fine job with her Robin Hood pictures, too.

Toni [Hardeman] did great stuff for my DOCTOR WHO story -- I love Page 17 with the Doctor and the giant apes. Thanks, Toni!

Kathie's DOCTOR WHO story was delightful. I got a chuckle out of Tegan playing strip poker with the crew of Calypso.

I liked Mary Robertson's story, too ["Mourning Is a Long Time Coming"]; although I don't know BLAKE'S 7, I felt she told -- better, showed -- me a lot about them.

"Tangled in Holly" just makes me want to find tapes of ROBIN OF SHERWOOD to watch!

The editorial about fandom's problem of categorisation got my dander up, too. I've always enjoyed science fiction, fantasy, and mythology in all forms -- written, in art, live-acted, on film and video, radio, records and tapes, and told around campfires and at slumber parties. Nobody can shove me in a box marked "media fan" or "intellectual snob" or anything else. The cons can plastic-wrap themselves if that's what the promoters decide to do, but as long as the zines remain non-commercial they can stay independent of labels. Here's to it! [Right on, Barbara!]

Thanks for keeping the good zines coming!

P.S. My theory about Easter Island is just that of an armchair anthropologist -- a sort of tongue-in-cheek speculation, since the story is, at its deepest level, about interpreting evidence.

From Kathie Hughes of Canton, Ohio:

I LOVED IT!!!! It really is one of the best zines I've ever seen, all prejudice aside... You've outdone yourself this time. The stories are all excellent... I really enjoyed the BLAKE'S 7, both of them. "Soap Opera" was great! The Robin Hood was also very good. I'm a little intimidated by her grasp of the characters. They were wonderful. I can't wait until the next issue for the rest. [Well, Kathie, it's in this issue. We hope you enjoy it!] As for the artwork, what can I say? Beautiful! Karen River can

bring those lovely hunks into my house any time. And Joan Hanke-Woods is, as I said, really superb...

From Glenna Hershberger of Wadsworth, Ohio:

I am writing again in response to THE SONIC SCREWDRIVER #3. Outstanding! Simply outstanding! [Pardon, please, while we blush...]

First of all, I was delighted to read Mary Robertson's "Soap Opera" story. I do love the characters of BLAKE'S 7, and she really has an edge on their personalities. I found the plot delightfully humorous and very entertaining. In my mind's eye I could envision Vila attempting to do the laundry, not to mention the problems he encountered. More than once... Oh, heck! There were several times I was practically rolling on the floor... Oh, it is so nice to read a story such that can make me laugh! And in her other story, "Mourning is a Long Time Coming," I really felt for Avon... Bravo, Mary! I would like to see more of her stories in the future!

"Test Match" was great! Her characters are very well defined. It's as if they come alive while I'm reading. Kathie has a definite talent for writing. The artwork with her story was simply fantastic; I was really pleased. When you have good artwork, the story stands out more, at least for me. I have never seen Peter Davison as the Doctor, but when I read Kathie's story, I had no problem fitting him in -- I just loved it!

"Tangled in Holly" was superb. I have never seen the cable TV ROBIN HOOD series. [Oh, you are missing something, Glenna...] However, I am a great fan of Robin Hood, both in the works of Howard Pyle and, of course, Errol Flynn's movie. I found the story fascinating, and I can hardly wait to read the conclusion! With the characters as I know them, Linda adds so much colour to their personalities. I found her story very intriguing.

Finally, I would like to add that the artwork is FANTASTIC!!!! The quality is far beyond any other fanzine that I have ever read. One of the determining factors, besides the material between the covers of a fanzine, is the quality of the artwork. The artists you have submitting are very talented. The portraits of Robin Hood by Karen River are superb! My compliments to all of the artists from #3!

And lastly, a few brief words from Jeanine Hennig of Bellingham, Washington, about THE SONIC SCREWDRIVER #4:

...Please convey my liking to the poet -- the lines really inspired me and were lovely...

Sincere thanks from the writers, artists, and staff of THE SONIC SCREWDRIVER #3 for all your kind words. We hope to continue to live up to your expectations!

OFFICIAL GUIDE-LINES FOR OSIRIS PUBLICATIONS

OSIRIS Publications has a professionally trained editorial staff. All our publications, although written by non-professionals, are and will continue to be handled in as professional a manner possible. The following guide-lines should be observed by anyone submitting material to OSIRIS Publications for any purpose.

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2. Written material should be neatly typed on 8½" x 11" white paper, double-spaced. Only one side of the page should be used, and all pages should be numbered. Hand-written or hand-printed manuscripts will be accepted only at the discretion of the editorial staff; these should be double-spaced on 8½" x 11" lined white paper. The editorial staff reserves the right to reject any manuscript not deemed to be sufficiently legible.
3. Art submissions should be in black and white ink only, with no large, dense black areas, and should be no larger than 8½" x 11", including a 1-inch margin on all sides. Due to the high cost of screening, pencilled or coloured art will be accepted only if deemed truly exceptional. All art must be completely camera-ready. Artists should send either originals or good-quality photocopies that require no touch-ups. Keep in mind, however, that original art is sent at the artist's own risk.
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7. No one will be notified of receipt of any submission unless that submission is accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope or postcard. No submissions will be returned unless accompanied by a self-addressed envelope bearing adequate return postage, and no returned submissions will be insured unless payment for that insurance is included with the submission. Once a submission has been accepted and scheduled for publication, the contributor will be so advised.
8. While decisions of the editorial staff are generally to be considered final, any contributor wishing to discuss an editorial decision should feel free to do so, and a decision may be reversed if the contributor can provide adequate support for such a change.

"The Children of Herne"

(By Kathie Hughes)

"Stand up, and turn around!"

The Doctor rose slowly, turning away from the camp-fire over which he had been stooping. He extended his hands in a non-threatening gesture, a broad smile lighting his face. "Hello," he said.

The voice he'd heard was feminine, but hardly demure. As he turned, he discovered the power behind the threat. Levelled at his mid-section, at a distance of perhaps thirty feet, was the point of an arrow snugly fitted against the string of a longbow. Holding the bow was a woman of average height, young, slender, and very attractive. Curly red hair fell to the waist of her nondescript dress, but her eyes were what caught the Doctor's attention. They were large and dark, and certainly uncompromising.

"I'm unarmed," the Time Lord added gently, relieved to see the business end of the arrow dip noticeably.

"Who are you, and what are you doing here?"

"I'm known as the Doctor, and I'm just passing through. I smelled the smoke from your camp-fire."

"Few come into Sherwood. Are you a Sheriff's man?"

"Sheriff?" He frowned. "No, I'm my own man. I've always felt very strongly about that. You wouldn't mind if I lowered my hands, would you? It's a rather awkward position for conversation, standing with one's hands in the air, and I've had this touch of lumbago lately." He grinned again.

The woman shook her head, a smile playing on her lips. She lowered the longbow, although she kept it in hand, and replied, "All right. You certainly seem harmless."

"Well, mostly. Where am I?" He looked around the clearing.

"In Sherwood. Didn't you know?"

"I said I was just passing through." He indicated the campsite with a wave of his hand. "So, you live here...uh...?"

"Marion."

"Ah, yes, of course," he nodded to himself. "It would be."

"Yes, at the moment, we live here. We move around, depending on the Sheriff." She looked at him

suspiciously again. "I'm not at all sure I should be telling you any of this."

"Well, I can guess most of it, anyway. Your name is Marlon. Your leader is Robin of Loxley, or Robin Hood. You travel with a band of outlaws, striking against the Sheriff of Nottingham and his men whenever possible, and helping the oppressed of this oppressive century whenever you can. How am I doing?"

The dark eyes narrowed. "For a stranger, you are quite well informed. I..."

Suddenly, out of the bushes stalked a stout figure in the brown robe of the clergy, his face red with the exertion of his haste. "Marlon! It's Much! I'm afraid he's been..." He paused, eyeing the stranger. "Who's this?"

"Hello, I'm the Doctor." The Time Lord offered his hand, but was met with a belligerent stare.

"I've had nothing more from him than that," said Marlon. "But he seems to know a great deal about us." Her bow twitched toward readiness. "Now, what's this about Much?"

"He's been shot."

She turned to face him, the Doctor momentarily forgotten. "How bad is it?"

"I don't know. He's been taken by Gisburne's men."

"Does Robin know?"

"Will's gone to find him. You know Gisburne will let him die, or worse yet, use him as bait to trap Robin."

She nodded, worried. "And he'll insist on a rescue, too, no matter what the chances. He won't let Much die."

"Perhaps I can help," the Time Lord interjected. "I'm not known around here, and I do have some medical skills."

"Why should we trust you?" the stout clergyman asked, looking anything but jolly. His shrewd eyes sized up the stranger.

"Friar Tuck, isn't it?" At the man's nod, the Doctor continued. "I don't see that you have much choice but to trust me now, do you?"

Marlon and the friar exchanged looks. "And how could you help us?" she asked. "You've admitted you're unfamiliar with the forest."

"That may be used to an advantage. I've always found the direct approach is best, haven't you? But first, I need to find my companion, Leela. Have you seen her? Tall girl in a sort of, well...skin." He waved his hands vaguely at shoulder and thigh height. Receiving no reaction, he sighed. "No, I guess you haven't."

"Marlon!"

This time, the interruption came from a tall, slim man with shoulder-length dark hair, who strode

into the clearing. "Much..." He paused, noticing the Doctor, and turned a puzzled gaze to Marion and Tuck.

"Yes, we've heard," the woman answered. "This is the Doctor. He's just passing through." She offered him a small smile, already a victim of the Time Lord's charm.

"That's right," the Doctor answered. "And I'll be glad to help you find your friend if I can. By the way, have you seen a girl...?"

His description was cut off by the sudden appearance of a scruffy-looking man, followed by an attractive young woman in a short leather costume. One of her hands clutched the man by one ear; the other held a dagger dangerously close to his throat.

"Release the Doctor, or this one shall die," she hissed.

"Oh, Leela," the Time Lord moaned.

"I have tracked you here, and I will not let them harm you, Doctor."

"Leela, let him go! My companion," he apologized. "She's very protective."

Just then, a huge bear of a man emerged quietly from behind a tree, scooped Leela off her feet and away from her victim, and knocked the knife from her hand. Fighting like a wildcat, she kicked and scratched, but her strength was no match for that of the giant.

"Good job, John!" Robin laughed, leaning on his bow.

"Good job?" the scruffy man protested, rubbing his injured ear. "Nearly tore my ear off!"

Little John laughed as he held the struggling Leela. "You'll live, Will, you'll live. But what's this? Overtaken by a girl? You'll fall to the Queen's lap-dog next."

Will Scarlet growled an obscenity.

"Put me down!" Leela cried.

John looked to Robin and, at his nod, released the savage.

"Leela, that was hardly polite," the Doctor reprimanded her. "We're guests."

She looked skeptical. The group gathered in the clearing did not appear to be the most congenial of hosts. "I thought they meant to harm you."

"Well, you were wrong. You didn't mean to harm me, did you? See? We're going to help them find their friend."

"Perhaps we should just return to the TARDIS, Doctor. You have done enough exploring. This forest makes me nervous." Her trained eyes scanned the shadows at the fringes of the clearing. "There is danger here."

"Where's your sense of adventure, Leela? Here's your chance to help Robin Hood."

"Robin Hood?"

"You know, and his merry men?" She shook her head, and looked blank. "Oh, never mind. I'll explain it to you on the way."

"On the way to where?"

"Nottingham."

"Nottingham?"

"Now, don't start that again!"

* * * * *

Leela tugged at the coarsely-woven garment Marion had given her to wear. The ankle-length sweep of skirt hindered her movements, at times tripping her or catching around her legs.

The Doctor had refused Robin's offer of a disguise, preferring his own gear, which was equally eccentric in any century. Broad-brimmed hat pushed far back on his curly hair and extravagant scarf looped around his neck, he strode through the brush oblivious to Leela's difficulties.

Robin and Will conducted the time travellers as far as was practical in daylight, alternately amused and amazed at the Doctor's knowledge of their exploits. Will had forgiven Leela for his injured ear, and spent a good deal of the journey suggesting they get to know each other better -- advances which were met with threatening looks from the huntress.

Finally, the outlaws left the Doctor and his companion at a path leading to the city of Nottingham. "Follow this road, and it will lead you directly into the city," Robin told them. "I will meet you at the gate at midnight."

"Thank you," the Time Lord replied.

"Oh, and Doctor, betray us, and I will kill you." The statement was made simply, leaving little doubt the outlaw meant what he said.

"I'll keep that in mind." Turning to Leela, he muttered, "Hear that? Betray them, and they'll kill us. Fine send-off."

"Let them try," she growled under her breath.

He shrugged. "Come along, then." He turned to wave, but their guides had already disappeared into the shadows. "Well, the plan's simple enough, anyway. We just appear in Nottingham, offer our services to the Sheriff, find out the location of their injured friend, report that back to Robin, and we're on our way. Simple, direct approach."

Leela smiled her skeptical smile. "But will it work?"

"Ah! My plans always work."

"Doctor!"

"Well, they sometimes do, and if this one doesn't, we'll try something else. That's what makes it so exciting."

She laughed, and they started toward Nottingham.

* * * * *

Robert de Rainault, Sheriff of Nottingham, toyed with his cup as he gazed at the tall stranger before him. "You're a magician, then," he drawled. "Well, magician, entertain us."

"Oh, hardly that. I do have a few tricks up my sleeve, though, or at least in my pocket."

With a speed that belied his relaxed stance, the Doctor delved into his coat pocket and drew out his sonic screwdriver. A twist of one of the controls, and the instrument began to emit a high-pitched whine. Gisburne, the young blond knight seated on his employer's right, started at the sound. The Sheriff -- short, bearded, elegantly dressed, and endowed with disconcertingly protruding eyes -- only smiled a slow, foxy smile. An intelligent man, he kept his lucrative position by wit and deceit.

The Doctor grinned back, and with a flip of his wrist, pointed the sonic screwdriver at the Sheriff's metal goblet. Slowly, the goblet moved across the table, finally falling to the stone floor with a crash and splatter of wine.

At once, Gisburne was on his feet, sword drawn, ready to leap across the table. Before he could move, however, de Rainault's hand shot out, caught the sword arm, and settled the knight back into his seat.

"But this is sorcery!" Gisburne sputtered.

"No, more like science. Magnetism, to be precise," the Time Lord replied, setting the sonic screwdriver to the "off" position and replacing it in his pocket. "But then, you wouldn't know anything about that, not for centuries yet."

"You're a clever man, Doctor," the Sheriff said, not taking his eyes from the stranger's face. "And you amuse me."

"Always happy to be amusing. As my friend the Brigadier says..."

"But not that amusing." The Sheriff turned his gaze to Leela. "And your assistant, what can she do?"

"Assist," the Time Lord replied with a shrug. He pulled a yo-yo from his pocket and absent-mindedly tossed it up and down. Gisburne stared in fascination. De Rainault, on the other hand, was far more fascinated by Leela.

"A shame that one so attractive should be dressed in so unattractive a manner. Sarah!" he bel-lowed suddenly. A servant appeared on his left. "Take this girl, and find her something to wear. Then bring her back to me." The woman dipped a bow, scurried over to Leela, and clutched her arm insistently.

"Doctor! I will not leave you here!"

"It's all right, Leela," he answered, still tossing the yo-yo. "Go with her." Almost imperceptively, he lifted his chin, his eyes meeting hers. There was no smile in them -- merely a warning. She nodded, and without another word turned and followed Sarah, who was now tugging on her sleeve.

Once again, the Doctor raised his head, his eyes meeting those of the Sheriff, and his smile was back in place. "I saw your men bringing in some poor fellow today. Hunting accident?"

De Rainsault's eyes narrowed. "What's your interest in him?"

"Oh, none, really. It's just that I'm something of a healer, too, and I don't care to see anyone suffer. I thought I might be able to help."

"The man is a member of a notorious outlaw band. It might be worth something to me to keep him alive. But at what cost, I wonder?"

The Doctor yawned, his yo-yo never missing a beat. "A place to stay for me and my companion, a meal or two -- good food, mind you. I don't ask much."

"Indeed, you don't. Why?"

The Time Lord shrugged.

"Very well. Take a look at the man. If you can save him, I'll see that you're bedded and fed. The girl, too." The last was said with a sneer directed at Leela, who had reappeared in a lovely red velvet gown. Gisburne giggled, bringing a cautioning look from his employer.

The tone of the last remark wasn't lost on the Doctor, who hastened to add, "I'll need my assistant."

The Sheriff frowned, and motioned to an armed man standing at the door. "Very well, take them down to the dungeon. But if there's any trouble, lock him in. But bring her back to me."

The Doctor caught his spinning yo-yo one last time, glanced up at the Sheriff, and tossed it with unerring accuracy in Gisburne's direction. "Keep it," he said. "There's more where that came from."

* * * * *

The dungeon of Nottingham Castle was the sort that gave such places their bad reputations -- dank, smelly, and teeming with rodents. The Doctor could feel his flesh crawl as the guard unlocked a grate in the floor, flipped it open, and pointed a dirty finger into the black hole.

"He's down there."

"Thank you. You don't suppose you could bring him up here?" The Time Lord emphasized the last two words, and at the guard's hesitation, indicated the smoking torches. "Light's much better."

The man shrugged, and shouted into the pit, "That new prisoner, bring him up here, and hurry it up!"

Mutterings could be heard from the depths as the guard slid a rickety ladder into the hole. Soon,

a large, bearded man appeared with a young boy slung over his shoulder. Gently, he laid the boy on the cold stone floor, casting a suspicious look at the Doctor and Leela, and a glare of pure hatred at the guard.

"Well, what are you looking at?" the guard snapped. "Back down there!"

Impulsively, Leela reached out and touched the bearded man's arm. "Thank you," she said, smiling. He returned her smile sadly, and turned to descend the ladder.

Quickly, the Doctor bent to his patient, his eyes scanning the feverish form for the wound. It was in the boy's side, an arrow wound that was already beginning to fester in the unhealthy atmosphere of the dungeon. Leela settled herself on the floor, heedless of the expensive gown she wore, and cradled the boy's curly head in her lap.

"We are here to help you," she said softly.

The Doctor shot her a warning glance, and looked up at the guard, who leaned against the wall, picking his teeth.

"Can you help him?" his companion asked.

"Yes, some." He flipped open a small plastic box he had brought from the TARDIS, and pulled out several tubes and bottles. "Good job the arrow didn't puncture his lung." Gently, he swabbed the wound with disinfectant, applied an ointment, and wrapped a bandage around the boy's chest. "That's about the best I can do under these conditions. It wouldn't do to stitch him up in all this filth. Better to let it drain."

Leela stroked the boy's head. "He is very hot."

"Yes, well, I can do something for that." Blocking the guard's view, he deftly gave Much one injection, then another. "We'll just let him sleep." He rose to his feet, and reached down to help Leela in her cumbersome dress. "That's about all I can do here. Can you let him stay out of the dampness?"

"Not my orders," the guard said gruffly. "Come up and get him!" he called into the pit.

"Better yet," a smooth voice answered, "let the Doctor take him down." Gisburne stood in the passageway, one booted foot on the stair. As they turned to face him, he swaggered toward them. "Go on, take him down."

Tossing his scarf over his shoulder, the Time Lord exchanged looks with Leela. Without a word, he gathered the still form onto his back and felt for the first rung of the ladder. Leela gasped and started for him, but Gisburne was ready for her. Deftly, he caught her wrist as she passed him, and jerked her backwards, away from the hole in the floor. Savagely, she broke his grasp with a strength that surprised the young knight, but her feet tangled in the heavy folds of her gown, sending her sprawling to the floor. Gisburne held her there with a heavy hand on her shoulder.

"He's down," the guard said, peering into the pit.

"Sorry, Doctor. I'm afraid the Sheriff has changed his mind. He does that sometimes." Gisburne addressed the guard. "Pull up the ladder." With a laugh, he kicked the grate closed.

"Doctor!" Leela howled as the knight caught her arm and hauled her to her feet.

Still holding the struggling woman, Gisburne leaned over the grate. "You just don't know who you can trust these days." With a cruel chuckle, he was gone.

* * * * *

Outside the city, Robin glanced nervously at the steady stream of people returning to their homes before sunset. It was still many hours until midnight, but he'd hoped the Doctor would appear early with some news. For all they knew, Much could be dead.

"They're not coming," Will observed glumly. "Probably sold us out, they did. There'll be soldiers through that gate and on us any minute now, just you watch."

Robin, dark brows knit, said nothing.

"I never thought we could trust them." The scruffy outlaw played with the point of his knife.

"Quiet, Will. It isn't even dark yet. We can wait, but not here. It's too dangerous. I think we should separate; at least then, if one of us is caught, there'll be a chance to warn the others."

Silently, the young man melted into the throng of people hurriedly finishing their daily business before the city gates closed for the night. Drawing his hood close about his face, he appeared nothing more than another of the labourers who milled about. Only the guarded look in his eyes could betray his identity.

Robin glanced up at the sky. It was getting dark. With a sigh, he offered a prayer to Herne the Hunter to protect the Doctor and his friend, and to help them return soon.

* * * * *

Leela tried time and again to twist away from Gisburne's grip on her wrist, but was too encumbered by the trailing gown to offer any real resistance. Better to wait, and seize the opportunity when she could.

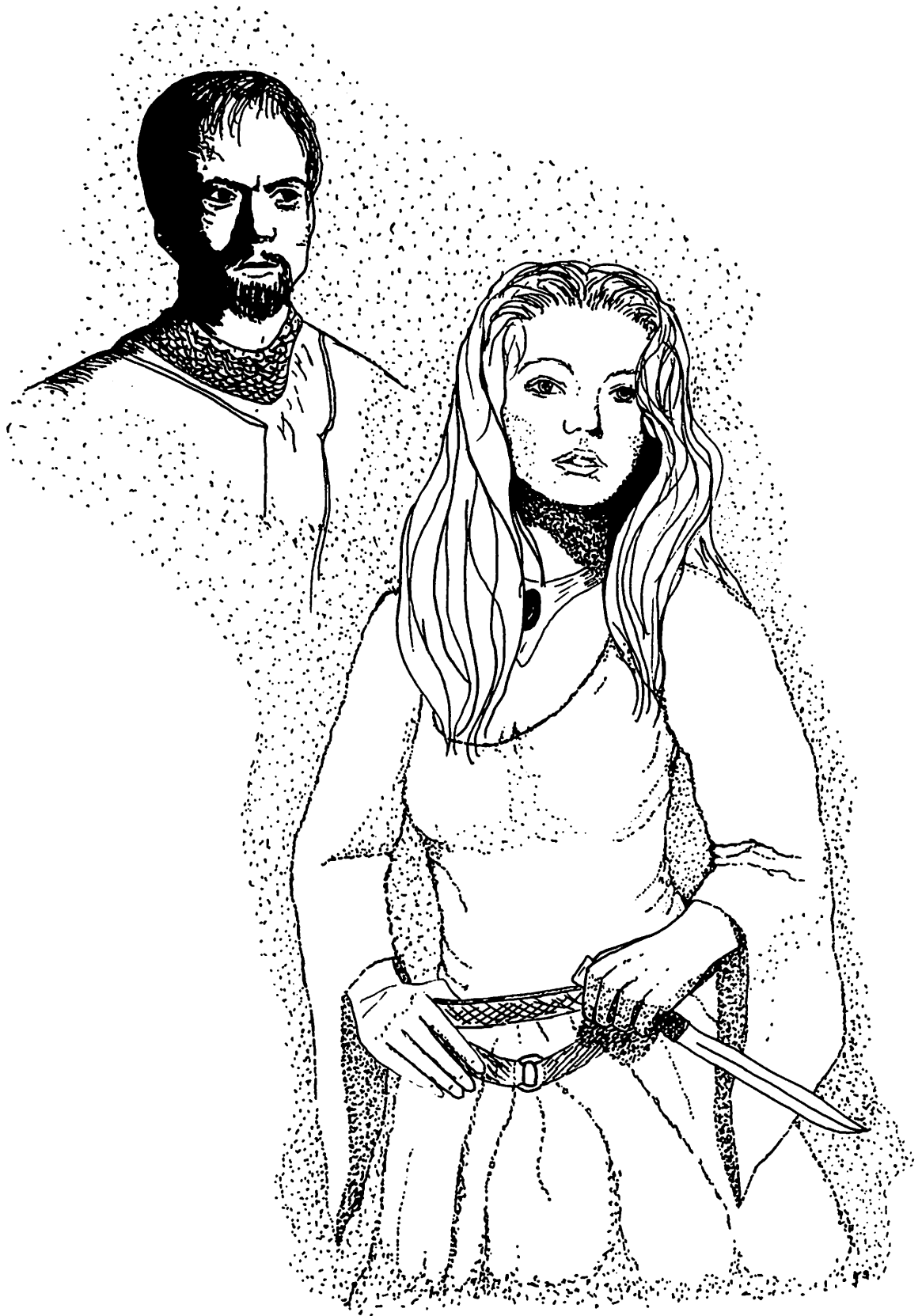
As she feared, they did not return to the dining hall, but instead climbed the stairs to...what? She smiled to herself. The Sheriff's private quarters, perhaps? Here was a man she would relish handling personally.

Finally, Gisburne paused before a door and knocked twice, sharply. In response to a muffled answer, he pushed the door open and shoved his captive into the room. With a smirk, he then stood in the doorway, studying the scene.

The Sheriff sat at a table, piles of parchment scattered untidily about him. When the knight entered, he turned. "Well, what are you waiting for? Get out, Gisburne!"

The knight's smile disappeared, to be replaced by his usual surly expression. With a quick glance at Leela, he stepped back into the corridor and closed the door.

The huntress surveyed the room with a practiced eye as de Rainault rose from his seat. There was only one door -- certain to be guarded -- a high window, and plenty of heavy furniture. Not the



ideal situation for a fight, although she was confident she could overpower this little runt of a man. What she needed was some sort of weapon. Her own knife was still at her hip, but hidden by the folds of her gown.

"Well," the Sheriff said, irritation in his voice. "You look very nice. Now, take off the gown, and let's get on with it." Indifferently, he shrugged out of his cloak.

She blinked, taken aback by his directness. "What?"

"Your clothes. Take off your clothes. What do you think you're here for, girl, a chat? I didn't figure you for a half-wit." He gave her a long, appraising look. "Still, you're passably attractive."

Leela turned away from him, a smile creeping across her lips. This is going to be easier than I thought. The perfect opportunity to get rid of this impossible dress... Slowly, she reached back and fumbled with the lacings of the gown, making little progress.

De Rainault sighed in exasperation, strode over to her, and ripped at the ties. His own clothing was in danger of tangling about his feet -- a fact not overlooked by the huntress. Freed of the bindings at her back, she quickly slid the sleeves down and off, followed by the skirt, leaving the dress in a heap on the floor. The Sheriff ignored her, turning to dump his own clothing onto a chair.

When he looked up, his frog-like eyes bugged out even farther. Before him stood, not the terrified, naked girl he expected, but a leather-clad fury with a knife pointing at his throat and the gleam of the hunt in her eyes.

"I am sorry, but I shall not be able to stay. Perhaps I will take a souvenir with me." She smiled wickedly, the point of her knife dipping lower.

In panic, the Sheriff gulped, instinctively protecting his vulnerable anatomy. Desperately, he took a step backward. "I thought...perhaps..." he stammered.

"You thought wrong!" she scoffed. "I am a warrior of the Sevateem, not some cowering virgin from your planet. Now, you will help me release the Doctor, or I shall kill you here and now."

"Not like this!" His voice rose a full octave. "My men!"

For a moment, she considered. The thought of marching this contemptible man naked past his men and into the dungeon appealed to her, but the risk was too great. Enough men would be able to overpower her and rescue him.

Keeping the knife pointed at her victim, she crossed the room to his discarded clothing, selected the ermine-lined cloak, and tossed it to him. "Cover yourself, then. But know that I will not hesitate to use this knife."

He nodded, and gratefully wrapped the cloak around himself, pulling it well together in the front.

"Good, that will keep your hands occupied. Now, summon the guard."

"Randolph!" he called shakily.

The door opened, and the guard appeared, eager for a glimpse of the activity inside. A fleeting glance at the Sheriff was all he got, though, as Leela expertly clubbed him with a log from the fireplace. With a grunt, he fell at her feet. She prodded him with the toe of her boot, got no response, and, satisfied, turned her attention back to the Sheriff.

"Now," she cooed, "we shall walk out as lovers, with the blade of my knife longing for your heart." She poked him through the folds of his cloak to prove her point. "Then you shall release the Doctor and the others, or I will kill you." She held his gaze steadily, sorry the Time Lord was not present to witness her triumph. But he would see it soon enough.

Silently, she gloated as she nudged the terrified de Rainault out the door.

* * * * *

The Doctor sat dejectedly on the dungeon floor, trying to ignore the damp squalor around him. He had already checked Much's condition, and was reasonably satisfied the boy remained stable.

"But for how long," he muttered to himself, "in this kind of environment?"

Around him, the other prisoners sat in silence, staring numbly at the pool of pallid light drifting through the grate. To them, the monotony was nothing new, but the Time Lord was restless.

"Cheer up," he implored, leaping to his feet and dusting down the seat of his trousers. "There's always hope." He thrust his hands into his pockets and strolled for the tenth time around the small cell.

"What hope?" one man asked forlornly. "Of death, perhaps. No other escape here." The others murmured in agreement.

"Well, there's Leela."

"What? Your lady? She's safely tucked in with the Sheriff by now."

"Oh, I don't know about that. You don't know Leela. And, she's not my lady," he added. "Trust me, there's hope. What about this grate? If we could get up there, there's a chance we could pick the lock..." He took a few experimental leaps, reaching high above his head, but fell far short of the opening.

"Twelve feet off the floor?" the bearded man asked wryly. "And with a guard on duty?"

The Doctor shrugged. "You're a sturdy chap. Suppose we build a human ladder. I'm rather good at locks, although I prefer the electronic variety, but then, I don't suppose you'd be familiar with those now, would you?" He continued to circle the cell, looking at the grate high above. Suddenly, the guard's face scowled down at him from the opening.

"Hullo!" the Doctor called, and waved cheerily. "Would you like a jelly baby? Just slide that ladder down again..." The face disappeared. "So much for that idea. Well, Leela, it's all up to you." With a sigh, he leaned against the wall, pulled another yo-yo from his pocket, and proceeded to entertain himself.

Suddenly, with a thud, the dim light from the grate was cut off entirely. A murmur of voices around the Time Lord told him this was not a common occurrence, and he jammed the yo-yo back into

his pocket. "Leela?" he called, hoping for the best.

"Doctor! Are you all right?"

"Fine, thank you, Savage. Is this a social visit, or are you here to get us out?"

The light returned to the cell as the covering -- the guard's fallen body -- was rolled aside. With a clang, the grate was thrown open, and the ladder slid down to the waiting men. Eagerly, they scrambled up, the Doctor bringing up the rear. He carried the unconscious Much across his shoulders. Seeing Leela, he favoured her with his best grin. "Well done, Savage!"

The huntress basked in his approval, a broad grin of her own spreading across her face. "How is he?" she asked, indicating the boy.

The Time Lord laid him gently on the floor. "He's not doing very well, I'm afraid, but he's alive, and I'm sure his chances will improve now." He glanced at the Sheriff, who stood against one wall, feebly clutching his cloak and worriedly eyeing the circle of prisoners surrounding him. One of them took the fallen guard's sword and advanced on his erstwhile captor.

"Here, now, none of that," the Doctor admonished. He stood up slowly and put himself between de Rainault and the angry men. With just the right amount of menace in his voice, he addressed the Sheriff. "I should let them have you, you know. In fact, I doubt I could stop them, but, you see, they're rather more civilized than you are."

Eyes nearly popping, de Rainault lunged past him in an attempt to break for the stairway, but Leela was too quick for him; knife still drawn, she blocked his escape. In desperation, he turned on the prisoner armed with the guard's sword and wrenched it from the weakened man's hand.

The Doctor sprang forward, deftly ducked the thrust of the sword, and grabbed the Sheriff's wrist with both hands, forcing the point of the weapon to the floor and finally taking possession of the blade. In disgust, he pushed away from the other man and, without looking, tossed the weapon to the bearded prisoner, who caught it expertly.

"Let me kill him, Doctor," Leela begged.

"No," he answered. "We're not his jury. What would killing him prove? That we're as much savages as he is, I suspect. Can we get out of Nottingham without him?"

"Yes, I think so," she answered thoughtfully. "I have taken care of the guard at the door, but there will be others at the gates."

"I think we can help there," the bearded man volunteered, hefting the sword and smiling.

"All right, then, the Sheriff stays. And we've got an appointment with an outlaw."

The former prisoners looked at each other uneasily, as if to question the Doctor's authority, but no one else seemed willing to take charge. Only Leela frowned.

"We should at least silence him," she muttered. "I suspect he can make a great deal of noise."

"No," the Time Lord said with a smile. "I've got a better idea." He turned to de Rainault. "It's time you sampled your own hospitality." With a wave of his hand, he gestured grandly toward

the hole in the floor.

"Down there?" the Sheriff shrieked. "In that filth?"

The circle of men laughed unkindly. Folding his arms, the bearded one replied, "Needn't worry about that, my lord. You'll be too busy fighting off rats to worry about getting dirty." De Rainault's horrified expression generated a new wave of laughter.

"March!" the Doctor ordered.

"Wait!" To the Time Lord's surprise, Leela went to their prisoner. "I shall have this!" With a wicked smile, she reached out, gripped the collar of the fur-lined cloak, and pulled it off, leaving the man completely exposed to the ridicule of his tormentors.

"Leela!" But, seeing her determined face, the Time Lord surrendered. "Oh, very well, have it your way. My lord Sheriff, if you please..."

More to escape the circle of men than anything else, the naked man rapidly clambered down the ladder. When it was pulled up and the grate secured, he called up from below. "You'll pay for this, all of you! Do you hear me? You'll pay!"

"Don't worry," the Doctor called back in return. "It's worth the price!"

* * * * *

Throughout the night, two hooded figures huddled in the shadows of the city gate. Midnight had long since come and gone.

"We're wasting our time," Will Scarlet moaned for the hundredth time. "They're not going to come."

"We haven't much choice," Robin sighed. "We can either give them until morning or abandon Much, at least until we can think of a new plan. It seems they haven't betrayed us, and that's something."

"So far..."

Just then, the gate opened slightly, and a tall figure emerged. He was followed by others, who moved rapidly along the wall toward them.

"Is it them?" Will asked incredulously.

"I don't know." Shrugging his bow higher on his shoulder, the outlaw moved deeper into the darkness, followed by his companion. Soon, they were within a few feet of the small group. "Doctor?" he called cautiously.

"Hullo, Robin. Seems we were rather more successful than we planned."

"Much?"

"He's here." The bearded man carried the boy out of the shadows. "This chap is Eldrich the turner," the Time Lord said, indicating the gaunt figure. "A convert for you, I think." Robin

and Eldrich exchanged nods. "The boy will be all right if I can get him back to my TARDIS. But we'll have to hurry."

Robin nodded again. "Let's go, then. And thank you, Doctor."

Even in the dark, the Time Lord could discern the flash of a smile, which he returned. "You're very welcome."

* * * * *

The glow of firelight filled the glen, reflecting on the figures in its circle. This was a celebration, since the Doctor, true to his word, had saved Much's life. To thank their new friends, the outlaws brought in two of the King's deer for the feast, and Friar Tuck did the cooking honours, ably assisted by Little John.

Happy and well-fed, Robin's men traded stories with the time travellers, and begged for more tales of the Doctor's exploits. Even the former prisoners joined in the merriment, both those who had elected to stay and those who were merely resting before going back to their loved ones.

Robin watched from the fringes of the firelight, one arm around Marion, his cheek against her copper curls. He didn't often have the chance to relax like this, and he relished the moment.

"He's an odd man," the outlaw mused. "It's almost as if he knows what will happen to us."

Marion nodded. "He reminds me of the Old Ones."

He drew back slightly, his eyes narrowing. "Herne?"

She shrugged. "His kind. He's a man, but not quite a man. Not like any of our men, or even the royals. It's odd, but sometimes I feel he's even more regal than they are..." Her voice trailed off, softening.

Robin turned her to face him, holding her by the shoulders and searching her face in the dim, flickering light. "I'm not sure I like the effect this Doctor has on you."

She smiled at him, her eyes twinkling, but made no reply. With a sigh, he grinned, and turned back to watch the festivities. "Then there's that girl," she added.

It was Robin's turn to be amused. "Ah, yes, Leela. I wish I had twenty like her."

"So do the men. Poor Will. He's been sulking like a whipped cur since he lost her to Nasir." With a lift of her chin, she indicated the two by the fire. The Saracen was talking animatedly, while the savage hefted one of his curved swords, enthralled by his every word. "He must be charming her with tales of the crusades."

"Yes, all that blood and gore would appeal to her." He laughed. Then he suddenly released her and got to his feet.

"What is it? What's wrong?"

"It's Herne. He wants me." She followed his gaze into the forest, but saw only a brief flash of moonlight on horn. "And he wants me to bring the Doctor."

"I'll get him." Winding her way through the merry-makers, Marion approached the Time Lord. He was lying stretched out on the ground, feet toward the blazing fire and head resting on the folds of his long scarf. His hat was pulled low over his eyes. For a moment, she thought he was asleep, but as she reached down to gently touch his shoulder, his voice boomed from beneath the hat.

"I rather like a good party now and then, don't you? It gives one a chance to unwind." He sat up, becoming serious. "Is anything wrong?"

She shook her head. "No, but Robin wants you. Herne has summoned him, and he would like you to go with him."

"Ah, Herne, your god of the forest." The Doctor smiled wryly. "I'd like very much to meet him."

"And Leela?" Marion asked, glancing at the Time Lord's companion, who sat across the fire from them.

"Oh, she'll be all right. She seems content enough where she is. Let's not disturb her, shall we?" He grinned, then waved at the huntress, who smiled and returned the gesture. "Come on. We wouldn't want to keep Herne waiting."

Marion cringed slightly at the Doctor's cavalier attitude toward their deity, and wondered suddenly at Robin's wisdom in bringing the Time Lord before him. But Robin knows best... She sighed. Well, most of the time, anyway...

* * * * *

The glen was filled with swirling mist, highlighted here and there by patches of moonlight that seemed to drift eerily through the trees. It was beautiful and mysterious, the perfect setting for a god to make his appearance. Warily, the Doctor peered into the shadows, then glanced at Robin. The outlaw seemed tense, but from anticipation rather than fear. The Time Lord relaxed slightly.

"This is the place," Robin announced finally, resting one foot on a fallen log and leaning on his longbow.

"Yes, I rather thought it would be. It would be a shame to waste all this lovely fog."

"Herne, we have come," the young man called, then waited.

In moments, a figure emerged from the mist, dressed in skins and wearing a massive, antlered head-dress.

"Impressive," commented the Doctor.

Robin ignored him. "We have come as you asked," he said softly.

Herne entered the clearing, and paused in a patch of moonlight. A smile touched his lips as he glanced from one man to the other. Finally, his eyes rested on the Time Lord. "Thank you for coming," he said simply, in an all-too-human voice.



The Doctor rubbed his chin, analyzing the being before him -- obviously a man, and not a supernatural deity. The costume and setting were used to their fullest effect; these, coupled with the Hunter's apparent telepathic link with Robin, provided the framework for this religion. The Time Lord glanced at his young friend, who stood in an attitude of reverence, but hardly of subservience.

Finally, he smiled. "Glad I could make it."

"You have been a great help to my son and his people. For that, I am grateful."

"Always happy to help when I can."

Herne turned to Robin. "Will the boy, Much, live?"

"Yes, thanks to the Doctor." He put one hand on the Time Lord's shoulder. "He's a very good healer."

"He is a Time Lord."

At this, the Doctor raised his head and looked the Hunter in the eye. The smile was gone from his face. "You seem to know a great deal about me."

"Only what I have been told by the Old Ones -- who you are, that you are a traveller in time, and that when you meddle in the affairs of these people, your motives are good."

The Doctor shifted uneasily, hands deep in his coat pockets, alternately irritated and concerned. "Oh, you know, we do what we can. Why are you so interested in my motives?"

Herne smiled. "I am only interested in what brings true peace to this troubled place, but the Old Ones have known of your people for thousands of years. Not all of their encounters have been so pleasant."

"Well, yes, I'm sorry about that, but we Time Lords are a rather single-minded lot. I can only vouch for myself."

"We do not condemn you, Doctor. On the contrary, we wish you success. You have a mission little different from that of this young outlaw. I will help you when I can, as I help him. You have only to call on me."

"I'll remember that, next time I'm in the neighbourhood." He looped his scarf over one shoulder and turned to go. "Meddle, indeed!" he muttered to himself. "You're mistaken, you know," he added, turning back suddenly. "I'm no galactic crusader. I go where Time and my whims take me, and I have no mission."

"As you wish, Doctor. But your help is always appreciated. Go with my blessing."

Shaking his head, the Time Lord turned again. "You're welcome," he said, and stalked off into the forest. Shortly, he was aware that Robin was again at his side, but neither spoke of the encounter as the forest closed around them.

* * * * *

It was nearly dawn when the Doctor and Robin returned to the outlaws' camp. The fire had burned low, and most of the revellers snored softly around the charred logs.

The Time Lord surveyed the scene, but Leela was nowhere in evidence. He shook his head, and slumped down onto a log. Marion materialized from somewhere with two cups of wine in her hands, offering them to him and her husband, who folded himself onto the ground beside the Doctor. With a tender look and a gentle touch, Robin sent her away. Silently, the two men sipped their wine.

"He's only a man, you know, not a god," the Time Lord said finally, his voice low.

"Yes, I know, but sometimes..." He lapsed into silence.

Above the rim of his cup, the Doctor studied him, scrutinizing his face, still boyish and vulnerable, but so determined. "He was wrong. I'm nothing like you, really," he sighed. "I haven't your commitment to your cause. In fact, I've always run away from commitments."

Robin ran a tired hand through his long hair. "I can't run from this." He waved the same hand, indicating the forest. "Where would I run? I'm the Chosen One, and they follow me. If some good comes from this, I suppose it'll be worth the cost." He studied the contents of his cup. "Sometimes, I want to run away, too. I want to take Marion, and run as long and as far from Sherwood as I can."

He paused, his voice catching in his throat. "But then, someone's house is burned, or someone's daughter raped, and there I am. There I must be, because I'm the Chosen One." His voice was bitter, and the dark eyes burned.

"I'm sorry." The Doctor didn't know what else to say. "I wish I could help you."

"You have, today." His mood lightened slightly, and he smiled at the Time Lord.

Placing a comforting hand on the outlaw's shoulder, the Doctor rose. "I'm going back to the TARDIS now," he said. "If Leela should happen by, you'll send her on, won't you?"

Robin nodded, still lost in thought. "Goodbye," he said to the Time Lord's back. "And thank you."

The Doctor smiled sadly, and disappeared into the forest.

* * * * *

Leela returned to the TARDIS early the next morning, smiling and ready to take on the universe. The Doctor had little to say to her. He demanded no explanation for her absence, and she offered none, choosing instead to hang about, flaunting the silky Moorish robe Nasir had given her.

Receiving no response whatsoever, she leaned over the console where he worked. "Where are we going next?"

"Umm?"

"I said, 'Where are we going?'" she repeated, much louder this time. Hands on her hips, she straightened, staring at his bent back as he punched coordinates into the TARDIS navigational computer, studied them for a moment, then punched in more.

Lost in thought, he glanced up at her. "Did you say something?"

She threw up her hands in exasperation.

"I think we need a holiday!" he exclaimed as the TARDIS dematerialized, clattering and groaning into the Vortex. "Something unique, but restful. Challenging, but not exhausting, don't you think?"

"You haven't the faintest idea where we are going, have you?"

"Not the slightest." He grinned. "I figured we would just leave it to chance this time."

"No crusades?" Leela asked innocently, fingering her robe.

The Doctor looked up sharply, but relaxed when he saw her ingenuous expression. "No!" he answered. "And no mission, either." He smiled, then offered his arm to escort her from the console room. "Come on. I feel the sudden need for a jelly baby."



"Sherwood's Lady"

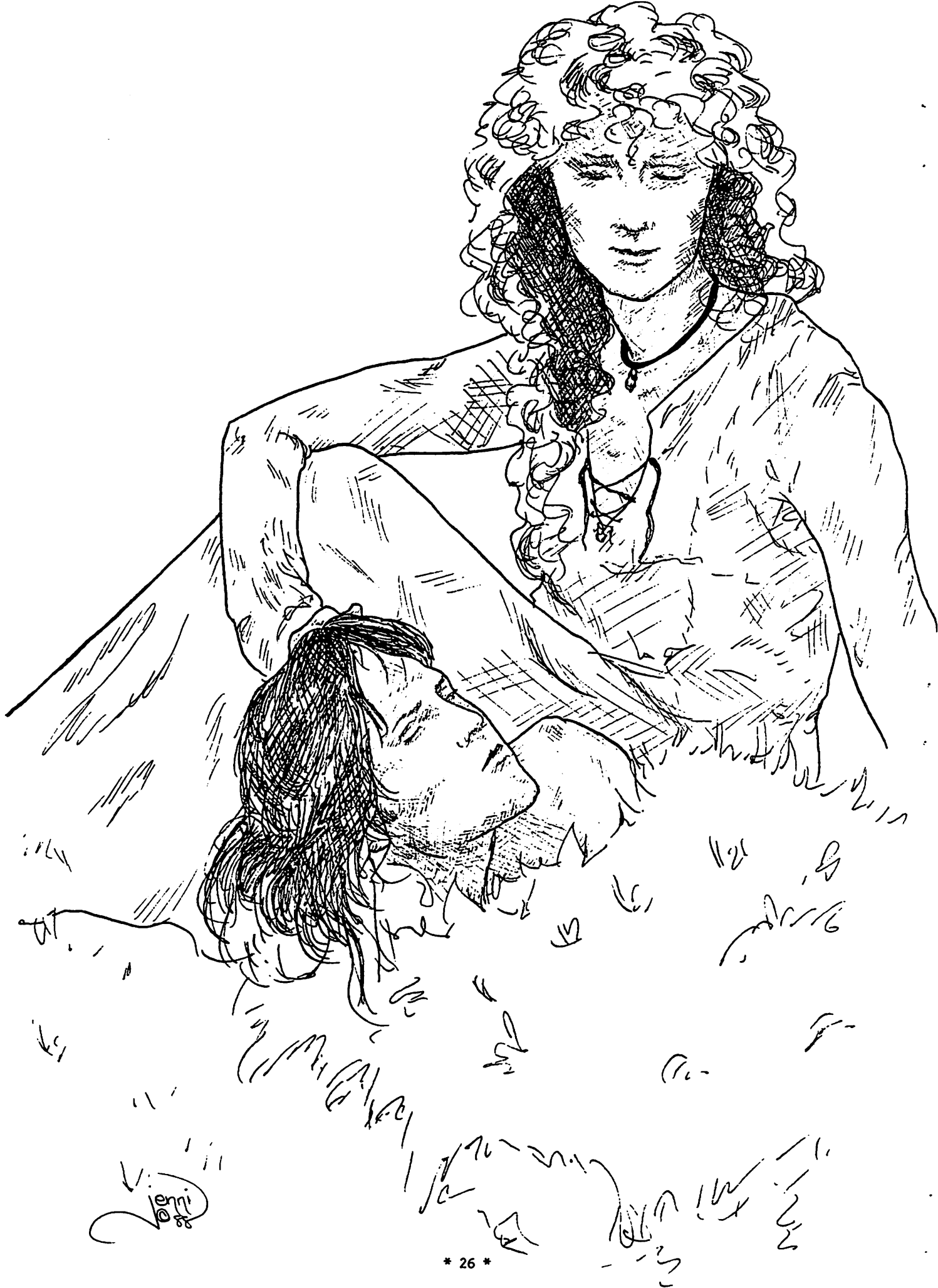
(By Mary Robertson)

I'm not a child of wood, or farm, or field,
But raised to know the safety of the Hold.
That I should find my life 'neath Sherwood's shield
Is passing strange, a sooth unseen, untold.

They name my husband outlaw, traitor, thief --
Yet he is none of these, not in his heart.
His fealty is tempered by belief;
His vision leaves him ever set apart.

He listens to the voices of the night,
The whisper of the wind across the leaves,
And often, past the waning of the light,
The Son of Herne lies sleepless as he grieves.

I'm not a child of wood, or field, or farm;
My Robin claims what loyalty I own.
I love the man, would hold him safe from harm,
And in the night, he fears to lie alone.



"The Dark Prince"

(By Mary Robertson)

It was late, well into the midnight watch aboard LIBERATOR, but Cally couldn't sleep. Restless, she paced the confines of her cabin, narrowly avoiding several sharp corners. Her anger built with each passing moment.

How dare he! How could he, how could anyone, believe a personal vendetta should take precedence over the rescue of an entire planet? Even worse, he seems to think my own sister would lie to me -- as if Zelda could lie in the telepathic bond we share! Impossible! Auron itself cries out for help! Why does he refuse to believe?

She shuddered as she remembered her earlier harsh words. "You don't think I stay because of him?"

But she did, at least in part. She couldn't be less than honest with herself. She had always been attracted to the cold, self-contained computer man on Roj Blake's crew. After Blake disappeared, she chose to stay, admiring the man's skills and determination, if not his oft-proclaimed self-interest. This, however, is too much!

Resolutely, she slammed a palm against the door lock. She would find that hard-hearted bastard, and tell him exactly what she thought of his attitudes -- and, for that matter, what she thought of his casual assumption of Blake's leadership. Seething, she went in search of Kerr Avon.

He was alone, deep in conversation with Orac, when she reached the flight deck, and he didn't spare her so much as a glance. "What do you want?" he snarled in a fair approximation of his computer's most obnoxious tones. "I am busy."

Cally waited, motionless, beside the forward lounge until curiosity compelled him to lift his head. The slap she delivered held all the power of her anger.

He recoiled under the force, but somehow seemed unsurprised. "I assume you have a good reason for this," he purred, rubbing his injured cheek with the back of one hand.

"You...! You...!" Unable to find words suitably vile in a language he knew, she switched automatically into her native tongue, loosing a flood of Auron epithets on Avon's head.

For his part, the man held his peace, blinking occasionally, but otherwise giving little indication that he even heard. "Are you quite done?" he inquired calmly when she at last fell silent. "I have decided to forgive you" -- he indicated the marks across his face -- "as you are obviously incapable of reasonable thought at the moment. This is about Auron?"

"Even you should be able to understand that." She fairly spat the words.

"Perhaps," he agreed, "but as I do not speak the language of Auron..." He left the sentence to dangle meaningfully between them as he rose from the lounge and yanked Orac's key. Shoving it



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into one pocket, he strode to his work station and played graceful hands over the controls.

Cally remained where he'd left her, staring after the leather-clad back. Her anger was spent. Anger never worked with Avon, but she had forgotten; he offered so many opportunities for it. Her rage accomplished nothing, only allowed him to remain in control, thus reconfirming his own superiority.

"Why, Avon?" she sighed at last. "Why do you think my sister would lie to me, help the Federation lay a trap for my destruction? She is my sister. You have a brother. Surely he..." She broke off as he tensed abruptly. "Avon?"

"How do you know that? What do you know about my brother?" he demanded, his hands tightening on the controls.

She was puzzled. "Only that you have one," she replied carefully. "Jenna mentioned him not long after I joined the crew. She was briefing me on some of LIBERATOR's defence capabilities."

"Ah." The man's silence stretched into minutes, until Cally began to wonder if he were all right. Startled by her own temerity, she crossed the deck to lay a hand on his arm. He flinched, a very un-Avonlike gesture that confirmed her suspicion something was wrong. Her concern grew as an expression very like pain flickered across his face.

This was the Avon they rarely saw, the Avon who was all too easily hurt, but who would never admit the hurt was there. It was this Avon for whom she stayed, this side of the man that could not be ignored and, once experienced, could never be forgotten. Why, however, should mention of his brother trigger such anguish?

"What was his name?" she ventured.

"Does it matter?" he countered, pulling away from her touch as if just realizing it was there. "He's dead."

She nodded her acceptance of his distance and returned to the lounge. I will wait... If she were patient, he would provide all the answers she wanted -- in time.

Avon grew increasingly more uncomfortable as the hours passed. Cally disturbed him. Her presence on the flight deck disrupted his watch in ways he couldn't begin to explain. Twice, he had to realign components that would have been installed correctly the first time but for his inattention.

At last, he gave up even the pretense of working on the equipment, choosing instead to prow! about restlessly. Cally said nothing, merely sat on the lounge; only her eyes followed him.

Finally, he could stand it no longer. "You have the early watch!" he exploded.

"Yes."

"You will be completely useless without sleep."

"As you often are?" she replied, pleasant but implacable. "I am not tired."

It was difficult to argue with truth. He did often stand the watch on little or no sleep, and she

knew it. Heaving a mental sigh, Avon bent once again to his precious computers, but his efforts proved no more successful than before.

After a time, he glanced up to meet her still-watchful eyes. "It is a trap."

"No. Zelda did not lie. I would have known."

"Would you?" he countered bleakly.

"It is impossible to lie in the mind link."

"No."

The word was without inflection, but the emotions behind it almost overwhelmed her. That makes no sense! I can receive the thoughts of only another Auron or a telepath. Avon is not of Auron. He is human, and humans have no telepaths among them. Do they? Funny thing, that. He almost seems to understand...

Now that she thought about it, he had always been at once both more accepting and more distrusting of her gift than the others. It was nothing so obvious as true telepathy -- she would surely have noticed that -- but he had proven receptive to her mental touch on several occasions, and had chosen to act upon those psychic nudges. Such acceptance, however, did not prevent him from harbouring suspicions about the reliability of her gift. Is it possible he is himself a latent telepath? It seems unlikely... Still, what other explanation is there...?

Cally looked up to find him staring at her intently. "Do you honestly believe the revenge of one man more important than the rescue of an entire planet?"

If he was surprised by her sudden attack, it didn't show. "When we have no reliable way to verify that planet's need for rescue, yes."

"That is the problem, then. You refuse to rely on other than mechanical means to confirm Auron's plight." Her eyes bored into his with an intensity that startled them both. "I felt my world's need, Avon. I wish I could share that need with you, but I cannot. It is no less real because of my failure. I did feel it."

"Through Zelda."

"Yes."

His silence spoke volumes.

"Why do you distrust her so? She has done nothing to you."

He answered with a question of his own. "You were exiled from Auron. Why call you back now? Why would you come? They are lying."

"You said that before. I chose to leave Auron. Now, I choose to return, to help. They need me. Their need is more important than my feelings. You know nothing about the mind link, Avon. If you did..."

"I know." He gripped the edge of the work station console, his knuckles white, but his voice was



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steady.

She waited. Minutes passed. "Tell me."

Suddenly releasing the console, he turned away, stopping before Zen's display screen. He rarely talked about himself, his past. That he attempted to do so now said much about the intensity of his feelings on this subject. Watching the man as he watched Zen's flickering lights, Cally wondered what he would say -- and what that revelation would cost them both.

"I am no telepath," he began in a voice so low she had to strain to hear. "Not as you are. I... My brother and I were..." He drew a deep breath and tried again. "I am a twin."

She stifled a gasp. Among the Auronae, multiple clonings were the standard, but twins were almost unheard of in the Alpha Domes on Earth. This explains so many things! His easy acceptance of my telepathy, for one... Twins often shared a special form of communication, she knew, similar to that she shared with Zelda.

"We were not identical, my brother and I, although we did share a certain...empathy. As children, we were inseparable. But we grew apart." His laugh held little warmth, and less humour. "How far apart, even I did not understand until too late."

He became quiet, so quiet Cally was sure he had forgotten she was there. But his next words were addressed to her.

"Do you know what my parents used to call me? Their dark prince. My brother was blond and tall, finally taller than Tarrant. He was everything my dear, bureaucratic parents wanted in a son -- obedient, trustworthy, generous, and completely loyal to the Federation." His voice turned acid with the memory. "I, on the other hand, was...difficult."

She smiled at that. You still are...

"Born into a privileged Alpha family, I had the audacity to question the 'benefits' of my birth-right. Benefits?" He snorted. "I was expected to slave for the government, then be grateful for the crumbs they threw my way, my 'share' of the millions my work made for them. The rebels were little better. They substituted 'the Cause' for their own pockets, that's all. The fruits of my labour were still not my own."

He paused, remembering. "My brother finally went into politics. Our parents were delighted, of course. I disagreed with his choice, but accepted it, as he accepted mine -- or so he had me believe. But when his rebellious twin decided to break into the Federation's banking system, that obedient, trustworthy, loyal citizen turned his own brother in for questioning."

He turned to her, his eyes wells of pain and betrayal. "He was there," Avon whispered, "at the interrogation. Through our link, I could hear him laughing."

"Oh, Avon!" She almost went to him, but something in his face stopped her cold. Instead, she asked, "That first day...on LIBERATOR. Jenna said you tried to go to him?"

"To kill him," he replied, his voice harsh with the remembered pain he would not acknowledge as such. "To make him pay for his deceit."

"Your...revenge... You plan to go to Earth to kill your brother? But you said he was dead..."

"He is dead." Avon's smile was enough to chill her to the core of her being. "I let it be known he was a member of the Resistance. He did not live long -- only long enough. I felt him die, and I was glad."

She paused, her senses overloaded by his emotions. "Why, Avon? If not him, who is it you want to kill? Why?"

But Cally had waited too long. Even as she watched, his mask slipped firmly back into place; he was once again in control. "That is my business, no one else's. But you will forgive me if I doubt your Zelda. Oh, we will go to Auron," he assured when she would have spoken. "But we will do it my way. My watch is almost over. As you are already here, I will leave the ship in your hands."

"Very well." She tried to hide her shaking; this encounter had left them both drained. She refused to let him know just how much his story affected her; that would be disastrous.

As he reached the doorway, she sent him a mental, "Thank you."

Only the slight stiffening of Avon's spine indicated he heard. She wasn't thanking him for Auron, and they both knew it.

Cally watched him walk away. Frowning, she turned to her duties.



"The Politics of Embezzlement"

(By Jeannie Webster)

"Did the data finish processing yet?"

The computer tech grunted and pointed at the screen in front of him, where information was scrolling out.

"That's it, then." Edwards, the smaller of the two men, nodded with satisfaction, then turned to his co-worker, smiling broadly.

Davidson wiped a sweaty palm on his trousers. "Good thing, too. If it hadn't worked, you know the boss would've blamed it on an error in our programming."

"Of course. He never makes mistakes." Edwards flashed the other man a mischievous grin. "That's why he's still working over in the auxiliary computer centre. Guess he doesn't expect any problems with his project."

"Well, I doubt even he expected the simulation to be this successful. The crystals seem to be the answer." Davidson gathered the data tapes and headed for the door of the small laboratory. "You know what he's like if he's not the first to know about these things."

He wound his way through the corridors of the vast computer complex, his excitement growing as he went, and poked his head into several auxiliary rooms similar to his own lab, seeking his supervisor.

As he raced into yet another room, he barely missed tripping over a pair of black-clad legs protruding from under one of the computer consoles. Close call, that! He'd learned much from this man, who was unquestionably one of the best computer techs in the Federated worlds, an acknowledged genius -- but sometimes, he wondered if anything was worth suffering the man's foul temper.

Faint sounds from beneath the console showed the man was still hard at work, ignoring his presence. "Mr. Avon?" No reply. He summoned up his courage and tried again, louder. "Mr. Avon!"

Kerr Avon reluctantly slid from beneath the console, sat up, and pinned his assistant with an icy glare. "And what is important enough to merit this interruption?"

"Those simulations you had me set up on the aquatar project..."

"You have the results?" The intent look in his eyes belied his expressionless face and the even tone of his voice. He gathered his tools, then rose and fastidiously dusted himself off.

Davidson smiled. "I thought you'd want to see them right away. They look extremely promising."

He led the way back to the experimental lab.

Hours later, the two men were still deeply engrossed in analysis of the test results. Next would come the task of translating their arcane mathematical knowledge, distilling its salient points for the reports to the next level of the hierarchy.

Finally, it was done.

* * * * *

"Kerr, my boy! Come in, and have a seat." Frel Henning, manager of the computer complex, smiled unctuously and indicated the chair in front of his desk. Avon stiffened at the liberty, but masked his feelings and managed an ingratiating smile in return.

"As you know, my boy, it's time for your annual performance evaluation."

Avon nodded. He was never one to suffer fools, but in this case, the power the other man held gave him no choice. "Before we begin, sir, I believe you should see this." He took a copy of his project report and pushed it across the desk.

"What is it?"

"The results from the latest simulations on the aquatar project. As you will note, they have been quite successful. With additional funding, a working teleport..."

"...would not be possible."

"I beg your pardon?" Something is seriously wrong! This information should guarantee a promotion, not to mention a fat raise...

"Teleport. Crazy idea, anyway, like something out of a bad holovid. I've recommended Development Section give it up as a bad idea."

"I don't understand, sir. These projections show..."

Henning glanced offhandedly at the report. "The Federation has neither the time nor the resources to waste on such idle speculations as these. There are more important priorities. Projections are one thing; results are all that matter. The subject is closed.

"Now, your evaluation. Your technical expertise is quite remarkable. However, your personnel file shows some problems in dealing with co-workers, most especially with your subordinates. I will not stand for that, Kerr. We're a team. Let's show some of that old team spirit, shall we?"

"May I ask if this 'team spirit' of yours includes condoning gross incompetence?"

"To whom in particular are you referring?"

"Rogers."

"Oh, my boy, you must be mistaken. He's one of the best men I have. In fact, I've recommended him to head the team to re-vamp security on the Federation Banking System. It's a high-priority project, very sensitive. Extra funding has been allocated to make certain it's a success. Every-



one is being reassigned, now that the aquatar project is to be disbanded."

"I see." Avon's eyes grew hard and cold. "And my reassignment? Is it perhaps to a less prestigious project? One that is less of a technical challenge? Not to mention less well paid?"

"I am sorry, but I have so many excellent people, and so few places worthy of their talents... Besides, you're not really management material, my boy. You see how it is, I'm sure."

"Naturally." Avon's smile was feral.

Henning smiled back, a broad and totally false smile that nearly split his round face. His eyes met Avon's, which were cold and piercing as a pair of laser probes. "As long as we understand each other, then. Now, if you'll just sign this form..."

The computer tech left Henning's office, cold rage building inside him. The most promising project of my entire career, snatched away before it can be completed! Then, to be shunted off on some stupid, routine assignment, while an utter incompetent is given the plum job...!

Kerr Avon was not a man to either forgive or forget slights easily. Rogers, in charge of security for the Federation Bank? What a farce! A five-year-old child could get through his safeguards!

And what a shambles that would make...!

A predatory smile spread across his face as he considered the havoc a highly qualified computer tech could cause. The consequences would be great, both for Rogers and for the man who recommended him for the job. And one could buy a good many things with a few million credits... He and Anna could run away together to one of the outer planets, where all that money would buy them luxury and security for the rest of their lives...

Still smiling, Kerr Avon went to meet Anna and tell her of his plan.



"Until It's Time to Go..."

(By Mary Robertson)

The man was old, ancient. Resting gnarled, misshapen hands against the low barrier of the railing, he leaned forward in his chair to drink in the crisp, cold darkness. He was so lost in thought that he didn't hear the children who surrounded him until the oldest one caught at his sleeve.

"Grandfather? Be careful, Grandfather. You'll fall."

He smiled wryly at her eight-year-old concern. "No, I won't fall," he disagreed, but settled back anyway, more to satisfy her than out of any fear for his own safety.

Fear. He'd had his share of that, enough to fill a dozen lifetimes. There was nothing left for him to be afraid of. His children, his grandchildren, they didn't understand. They didn't understand his fearlessness any more than they understood his longing for the feel of the night wind against his face.

How could they? They had grown up surrounded by fresh air and freedom. They took it for granted. His childhood was spent under the Domes of Earth, breathing recycled air, learning the value of "getting along," lest one's neighbours call in the authorities -- or worse. After the Domes had come a seemingly endless round of prisons and planets and spaceships, some large, some small, but all under the watchful eye of the Federation.

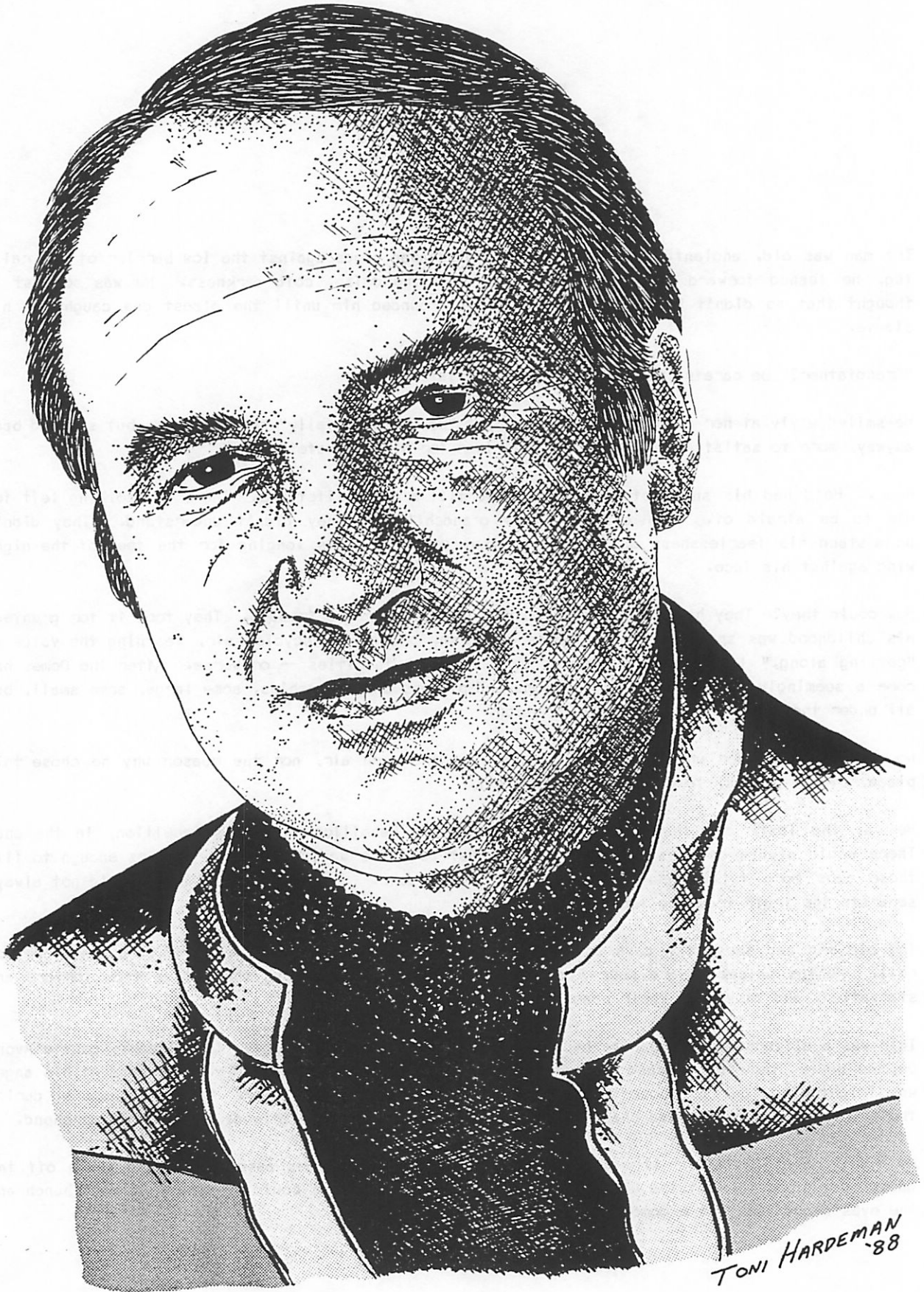
No, they would never understand his longing for the open air, nor the reason why he chose this place, of all places, to end their every visit.

He was the last, all that was left of Roj Blake's Rebellion -- Avon's Rebellion, in the end. There would always be gaps in their story, just as there would always be rumours enough to fill those gaps more fully than any truth might have done. Even now, he himself could not always separate the truth from the legend.

The old man had spent the days and weeks following the debacle on Gauda Prime in a lonely prison cell. Months passed before Kerr Avon rescued his thief, more dead than alive from torture and starvation, and they made their peace.

This was a different Avon than he had ever known before, a surprisingly, inexplicably gentle Avon. Oh, he never lost the sarcasm for which he was so rightly famous, and the coldness of his anger was frightening, but to those he considered his friends, he was kind. Whatever happened during those intervening months had changed him, changed him in ways his friends could not comprehend.

He would never explain. It wasn't Avon's way to explain. When asked, he would shake off the question with a turn of the head, yet the one who knew him best could see the shoulders hunch and the eyes cloud for just a moment at some forbidden memory.



Avon had done it, had won the war he never wanted to fight at all. If Blake's death had accomplished anything, it had been to give the Federation a single-minded saviour. It was Avon's plan that drew the rabble, all unwilling, under his leadership; it was Avon's reign of terror that led at last to victory and to peace.

But when Blake's War was well and truly won, he refused a place of honour in the new regime. Instead, he took his ship, his computer Orac, and his useless thief whose health and hands had been destroyed in a prison cell on Gauda, and he built them a new life. Those were the happy years. Vila found a wife, started a family; and Avon found, if not the wealth he had always longed for, then at least a kind of contentment.

On the eve of Vila's seventieth birthday, Avon brought him here, to the highest point on their quiet, sparsely populated little world, and gave him a gift, with instructions not to open it before the next day's sunrise. That was not unusual. Each year, Avon made the same request; each year, Vila complied. It was the only thing Avon ever asked of his friend.

They talked a lot that night, about their childhoods, about the War, about Blake. Vila got happily drunk, and Avon let him -- another birthday ritual. Then Avon took him home.

When morning came, Vila's children crowded eagerly around their father to see what incredible gadget Uncle Kerr had made this year. To their disappointment, it didn't look exciting at all -- just a sort of small, squarish piece of plastic.

Avon was gone. There were no tears, and no goodbyes. He refused to prolong the inevitable. Remembering another planet, another time long past, Vila thought perhaps, with Orac's key, his friend had left him a message.

The irascible little computer seemed almost subdued. "Not yet," it replied when questioned. "I will let you know when the time comes."

And the time did come. Vila learned Avon had finally succumbed to the biological time bomb with which his sworn enemy Servalan had burdened him so long ago on Gauda, that this world's doctors had kept him alive far beyond his expected span, and that death would come as a welcome friend after years of hidden pain.

So Vila was alone.

That was forty years before, but the old man remembered it as if it were yesterday. That was the reason he returned to this place, the reason he had come tonight -- to remember, and to forget. His own leaving was not so very far away. "I will be with you soon, old friend," he whispered into the stillness. "Soon."

"Grandfather?" A soft voice sounded in his ear, and a tiny hand crept to cover his useless one on the rail.

"It's all right, Luv." His voice cracked like crumpled cellophane. "Your Grandfather's just a little tired tonight."

"Shall I get Daddy?"

"That's a good idea," he agreed, patting her hand in reassurance before angling his motorized chair away from the barrier. "Yes, I think it's time to go."



"The Ring of Ruani"

(By Vicci Cook)

The landscape was barren and dry. Wind howled overhead, sending great swirls of dust into the air. The Doctor stood outside the closed door of the TARDIS and surveyed the scene. There was nothing in any direction but brittle shrubs and hard, packed, cracked earth the colour of eggshells. He ran a hand through his tangle of white curls and stepped a few feet away from the door, eyes straining.

The door opened behind him, and a young blonde girl popped out, comfortably dressed in a black jumpsuit and walking shoes. She peered around the Time Lord, using his body for protection, and he pointed toward the west, shielding his eyes from the glare of the planet's sun. "Well, Jo, are you ready?" He half-turned to smile at her.

She touched his arm lightly and took a deep breath. "Ready as I'll ever be. Let's go." And with that, they set off across the flat terrain, occasionally putting handkerchiefs to their mouths to protect themselves from the blowing dust.

The two companions trudged on. Jo kept her eyes on the Doctor, staring at the green velvet of his jacket, watching the now-familiar movement of his shoulders as he forged ahead. She wasn't sure she would ever get used to the adventures he constantly led her into, but she always rallied. Anyway, she thought, straightening her shoulders as if in defiance of an imaginary foe, he needs me...

"Look, Jo." The Time Lord had stopped, and pointed straight ahead.

"That looks like a jungle!"

"Yes." He rubbed the side of his nose with one finger. "Odd, isn't it, right on the edge of a desert?" He contemplated it for a moment, then moved on toward the lush, green forest. She stared ahead as if transfixed, then broke into a trot to catch up.

When she reached it, she plucked at his sleeve. "Do you see what I see?" she asked, indicating the sky above the forest.

His eyes followed the direction of her finger. Above the trees was a ring of light, brilliant in its beauty, like a prism reflecting all the known colours of the universe. It circled a large area of the forest.

"What is it?" Jo gazed, eyes wide.

"Some sort of force field, I imagine. Looks like it takes in the entire forest."

"Will we be able to get in?"

"I don't know. But whoever sent that distress signal should be expecting someone to arrive." He didn't hesitate, but set off purposefully toward the forest.

He stopped at the very edge. "See here, how there's a definite line of division? Dust here, grass there."

"And it does seem to curve."

He picked up a dry branch and tossed it; it bounced off the unseen barrier. "Well, it's not a destructive field, anyway," he murmured thoughtfully, rubbing his chin.

Jo scanned up and down the ridge of forest, then reached out a tentative hand to feel the barrier. It seemed rubbery to her touch, and gave a little when she pushed. She laughed a little nervously, and began to push harder.

Suddenly, there was a low hum. Before she could pull away, the barrier gave, and she fell through onto a soft carpet of grass.

"Good work, Jo!" the Doctor said as he gingerly stepped through the opening and offered her a helping hand.

"Did I do that?" She dusted herself off.

"I expect they knew we were here, and made an opening."

"Whoever 'they' are," she added drily.

"Mmm, yes." He gazed up and down at the spot she'd fallen through, and touched it. The barrier was back in place, and firm. "Well, onward."

As they pushed through the dense foliage, Jo became aware of a growing sensation of well-being, manifested by a light tingle all over her body. She moved lazily, languidly pushing branches aside. The Time Lord swiftly pulled ahead of her.

"Doctor," she called softly, then rallied to deliver a more forceful call. "Doctor! Wait!" He turned, and waited for her to catch up. "Don't you feel that?" she asked, panting.

"Feel what, Jo?"

"Such a feeling of...of..."

"You mean that tingle? Euphoria?"

"That's it! Euphoria! I feel like nothing could possibly ever happen. Life is so...grand!"

"Yes, I did notice..." He hesitated, and gazed beyond her. "But I suppose we can ask them about it when we get there."

She followed his gaze, turning to see three armed men dressed in uniform advancing on them with blasters levelled.

* * * * *

"I'm quite sorry about your...reception, Doctor." Devvon, Mayor of the City of Euphoria, indicated padded chairs suspended in midair before him. Jo cautiously slipped into one, and sighed contentedly as she nestled in. The Doctor chuckled, and chose one next to her.

Devvon slid lazily into his own seat, pulling rich, opulent red robes about him with a gentle hand. The chains about the folds of his neck tinkled softly as he moved his fingers delicately over his long, thick white hair.

Everything in the room seemed to hang on a cushion of air. A soft, green glow permeated everything, and Jo heard a low melody, although she couldn't tell where it came from. There were exotic plants, with a riot of colours to delight her eyes. She smelled a sweet fragrance, and even the faint melody seemed to caress her ears and skin. She didn't hear a thing the Doctor said to the man suspended before them on his light pink sofa.

"Yes, Doctor, we did detect your ship, and sent you a signal. Oh, we know all about you. Be assured, we are only asking your help in a matter that is becoming increasingly grave to those of us living inside the barrier."

"Which is?"

"Holes."

"And you are quite obviously trying to keep something or someone out. Or in."

"Yes, hence the weapons. We haven't had weapons in Euphoria in hundreds of years. But lately, there have been rumours of revolt among certain of the younger members of our society, who feel life here is much too soft, too easy."

"You sound as though you may be convinced of that yourself."

"It's my job to keep Euphoria...euphoric. This place was created as a retirement city. But as the planet became less and less habitable due to changes in atmospheric conditions, everyone eventually migrated here. Doctor," he said, leaning forward in urgency, "if the barrier breaks down, life on this planet will end. Nothing can live outside the life support of the barrier, not for long."

"Why do you need me?"

"Over the past hundred years, the children born here have become less and less susceptible to the effects of our system. At first, there were only a few, and they managed to adapt their livelier metabolic systems to those of the norm. But now, a large group has arisen who want 'to get back to the land.' They want to do away with the barrier completely, to see the forest grow and spread to the rest of the planet. Doctor, it simply cannot be done."

The Time Lord rubbed his chin thoughtfully. "Sounds familiar."

"This planet is dead. There's nothing out there." Devvon put a fluttering hand to his head, then passed it over a panel. Instantly, the image of a softly lit room appeared in the air before them; in its centre was a pedestal. "The Ring of Ruani has been stolen!"

"The Ring of Ruani. Of course," the Doctor mused. "Yes, I've heard of it. A high energy

source. But your barrier is still up, Devvon."

"Oh, the Ring cannot be destroyed. But it can be altered. It was altered all those centuries ago to produce our euphoric state. Already, you see the effects. I am agitated. Only a year ago, I could never have drafted soldiers such as those who escorted you here. It's all so very distressing!" He mopped his face with a silken handkerchief. "Doctor, because you are a Time Lord and your metabolism isn't susceptible to our euphoric effects, I am pinning my hopes on your help. The rest of us will simply deteriorate as the euphoria wears off."

The Mayor glanced at Jo, sleeping serenely in her oversized chair. "Your companion, however, seems to be utterly affected."

The Time Lord grinned. "That's the sleep of a clear conscience."

* * * * *

Jo rolled to her side and snuggled her face into the warm pillow, then stretched lazily like a cat. But there were no kinks to work out; every muscle in her body was relaxed. Slowly, and with great effort, she rolled onto her back.

The Doctor grinned down at her. "Hello, Jo."

"Oh. Good morning. I think..."

"You had a nice, restful sleep. You should be all ready to assist me now, don't you think?"

"Doctor, I can't even move my little finger right now." She focused on a long tube suspended over her pallet. "What's that?"

He straightened up and smiled. "That, my dear Miss Grant, is your bath." He pushed a button, and she was bathed in a shimmering yellow light. When it shut off, she felt as if she'd just luxuriated for an hour in a bubble bath.

"Even my clothes are clean!" she exclaimed. The Doctor handed her a small cup. "What's this?"

"Just something to counteract the effects of Euphoria's system on yours. Go ahead, drink it."

She took a gulp. "Oh, yuck!" She grimaced, but in a moment or two was feeling more like her old self. "Is this a laboratory?"

"Yes. I preferred having you here on a plain pallet where I could keep an eye on you. You may never have awakened if you were in one of their soft, comfortable beds."

"I'm afraid I've missed the gist of what's going on here," she said, getting up and going to peer over his shoulder as he worked at a computer terminal.

He explained. "...and it appears we have a small band of revolutionaries, most probably hiding in an abandoned building toward the outer fringes of the barrier." He punched up a read-out, and Jo leaned over him, reading off the list of names.

"That looks like a pretty formidable group."

"Yes," he said, rubbing his nose thoughtfully. "And I think our best bet is to go as emissaries of peace."

"I'll go get my olive branch."

* * * * *

The two companions were not well received by the revolutionaries. They were seated opposite each other across a rickety table, their hands tied behind them; a guard stood watch over them, weapon levelled.

Sighing, the Time Lord cocked an eyebrow toward the guard as Jo fumbled with her bonds. "Nice day," the girl said, stopping briefly as the guard stared at her.

"Silence!" he shouted.

"So much for diplomacy," the Doctor muttered.

She fumbled some more, then her body gave an almost imperceptible jerk. Raising one eyebrow, the Time Lord looked at her. Now, only a minute alone will do it...

But just then, the door opened, and a tall man strode into the room flanked by two others. "Leave us," he said to the guards, who stationed themselves outside.

"My name is Porter, Doctor. I head up this band. I understand you have been sent by Mayor Devvon to 'persuade' us of the error of our ways."

"I'm here of my own free will, with Devvon's authorisation. But not to persuade you to blindly follow what he wants. I want to hear your side of things."

Porter sat down and ran his fingers through his thick black hair. He had lively dark eyes and a quick smile. Jo instantly warmed toward him. Maybe the "bad guys" aren't quite so easy to identify...

"But my manners are bad, Doctor. My men are quite zealous, I'm afraid. Let me cut you loose."

"Uh..." Jo slowly placed her hands on the table.

The rebel stared at her with raised eyebrows. "Very resourceful." He quickly untied the Time Lord, who rubbed his wrists.

"Now, first, let's get all this straight, Doctor. I'm a scientist, as you are. I am not a blood-thirsty mercenary. But the city is on a slow road to destruction, and the only way to stop the deterioration is to loose the energy on the planet."

"So you took the Ring."

"Yes, I have it. Come with me."

The Ring of Ruuanl rested in an earthen dish in a well-guarded room stocked with laboratory equipment. Porter thrust his hands into his pockets and nodded at it. "Go ahead, examine it. It can't harm you."

"Yes, I know." Curious, the Doctor picked up the basketball-sized artifact.

"It's so light!" Jo exclaimed as she took it from him.

"Precisely," the Time Lord said. "It's light. Light waves and prisms. A bit too complicated to explain. What experiments are you conducting, Porter?"

"I took my results to Devvon, and he threatened to have me expelled from the laboratory. Not that anyone would have the energy to do it."

Jo sniffed, and placed the Ring carefully back in its dish.

"Devvon's wrong, Doctor. By breaking down the barrier little by little, we can ease the people of Euphoria into the transition with very little effect to their systems. It won't be without some discomfort, of course, but the results would be well worth it."

"Prove it."

"Over here." The scientist's voice was animated, and the two men bent over a sheaf of notes and equations that Jo found too boring to claim her attention even the slightest. Ambling around the room, she poked into trays and peered into microscopes until, finally, she sauntered out the door, where she was confronted by the guard.

"You don't have to point that thing at me," she said with a sigh. "Haven't you heard? We're guests now."

A slow, malicious grin spread across the man's crooked face as he pointed his blaster at her head. "No, I hadn't heard. And you're just the kind of hostage I've been looking for."

* * * * *

"I see," the Doctor said thoughtfully. "Yes, you're quite right. It can be done."

"Look at that forest out there!" Porter cried, waving his arms in an all-encompassing gesture. "No one cares for it. Everyone sits in their comfortable cubicles, passing their hands over control panels, slurping up liquid food so they won't have to chew. What started out as a good experiment for Ruuani's senior population has turned into an excuse for decadence for the entire planet. Ruuani could have lived, could still live. It's all there in my notes, in the history books."

He passed a hand over his face and took a deep breath. "Can you help me, Doctor?" he asked quietly.

"You know it would be useless to try to persuade Devvon."

"Yes, yes, I know."

"But, perhaps if we showed him..." He broke off and glanced around the room. "Where's Jo?"

Precisely at that moment, one of Porter's guards pounded into the room, breathless. "It's Brand! He's taken his group of dissenters and made off for the city. They have the girl..."

"Porter, you go ahead with your plan," the Time Lord called as he sprinted for the door. "I'm going to borrow your guard."

"Yes, go on..."

But the Doctor didn't hear him. He was already racing toward the city, with the guard at his heels.

* * * * *

"This looks like it, old chap," the Doctor said to Stahl, Porter's guard. "Can you call up any of your fellows from within the city?"

"We still have many within, yes. I can do that."

"Good. Alert them to be on the look-out for Brand and Jo. It would be helpful to know how many we're up against."

"They are few, Doctor. But they have something we don't."

"Which is...?"

"Brand used to be Chief Engineer. He has the key to the nuclear generator."

* * * * *

Jo paced furiously in her small cell. It stank of mold and decaying matter. There was a wooden pallet in one corner, and a bucket of scummy water, with a wooden cup floating on top. Desperately thirsty, she gingerly picked up the cup and swirled away scum of the scum, then dipped it in and raised some water to her lips. A water skimmer glided across the top, and she dropped it to the ground with a cry of disgust.

How can such a place exist in a city like this? She tiptoed to the door and peered at every crack and crevice in the massive block of wood until she found a hole large enough to allow her some view of what lay beyond. She could see no one, but she wasn't sure she was alone. There didn't seem to be any keyhole.

Leaning every ounce of her slight body against the door, she pushed, straining and grunting, then stopped and wiped sweat from her face. That was useless, and only made her thirstier.

Then her eyes followed the only light in her cell. It rose like a friendly beacon to a narrow hole in the stone wall high above her head.

The pallet didn't stand very high, but the bucket was wide and deep. She dragged the bedding to the wall, emptied the water onto the floor, and turned the bucket over on top of the pallet.

Carefully, she climbed onto the pallet and placed one tentative foot on the bucket. It wobbled a little, but seemed to support her. She stood on tiptoe and strained toward the sill, gripping the ragged edge. A few jutting stones in the wall provided footholds; soon, she had hoisted herself onto the window ledge and squeezed through the narrow opening.

She found herself facing a tangle of bushes and dense undergrowth, none of it familiar. Ruuan's sun was sinking. She didn't see any moon, and her sense of direction was completely gone in so foreign a place.

"Eenie, meenie..." she muttered, then plunged into the unknown depths of the forest.

* * * * *

"Doctor, this is Tormon, our inside man here."

Before them stood a squat, bespectacled man, utterly unpretentious. He wore the inevitable white lab coat and rubbed the bald spot on his head, smoothing his few grey hairs across his pate. "The barrier is breaking down, yes. Much faster than it should. This is not the work of Porter."

"Brand, then."

Tormon mopped his face and neck with a square of cloth. "I am afraid that is probably true. Come."

He led the Doctor and Stahl across the lab to a computer console and punched a few buttons. "This is a view of the nuclear reactor room. It is used only for the energy that operates our comforts, our labs and experiments." He programmed co-ordinates, and a scanner zoomed in on a close-up of the reactor core.

The Time Lord stared at it. "Sabotaged," he said, brows drawn. "The barrier will break down and disintegrate. Porter's plan will backfire."

"We can't get in there. It's too hot."

"For you, maybe, but not for me. Stahl, go back to Porter, and give him this." He sat down and hastily scribbled some equations on a piece of paper. Tormon, leaning over his shoulder, nodded and smiled in satisfaction. "Get some men to try and find a lead on Brand and Jo. They won't harm her so long as she's useful, but the sooner we find her, the better."

Stahl nodded and left the room, and the Time Lord turned to Tormon. "Now, my dear chap, if you will kindly lead me to the reactor room..."

* * * * *

Jo wearily pushed through the undergrowth, then sank to the ground in frustration, hot tears gathering in her eyes. She wiped them away and rubbed her nose, smudging dirt across the tip. The sun had disappeared; in its place, only a hint of light came through the barrier. Staring overhead, she noticed only one star shining brightly; it afforded the only light she had. The forest was still, quiet, without even the noises of night creatures, and she suddenly realized she had yet to see any sort of animal life -- other than the water skimmer in her cup.

She sat motionless, feeling terribly small and lonely.

When the sound of snapping bushes and crackling brush reached her ears, she stared about wildly, then dived behind a massive tree, hugging its side as though she could blend in with its bark. Light beams traversed the bushes where she'd sat only a moment before; she was sure her captors were searching for her.



Faintly, Jo heard the whisper of voices; she strained to hear the words, but could not decipher any of them. Then the light beams moved on and disappeared, and the voices faded.

Cautiously, she moved out from behind her shield -- and stepped squarely into a new beam of light, and heard Brand's hoarse laughter. She grabbed the first thing she could lay her hands on -- a stout, heavy branch -- and swung it. A yelp of pain and the wild flailing of the light told her she'd struck her target.

Jo bolted. She crashed blindly through the jungle, gasping for breath. Branches snatched at her hair. Behind her, the cries of Brand and his men drew closer.

Then something hit her. She cried out, and lashed angrily at her unseen enemy. It only shoved her back -- hard. She darted away and scrambled to the side. It hit her again.

Then, suddenly, she broke free. Feeling as though she'd been pulled through a sieve, she crashed to the ground.

Her head swam; her eyes were unfocused. She clutched at the dirt and raised her fist. Sand filtered through her fingers. Staring up at the sky and the bright star overhead, Jo gazed around in perplexed wonder.

She was outside the barrier.

* * * * *

"Doctor, I am very concerned about your going in there." Tormon wrung his hands and paced nervously about the control room.

The man he addressed had slipped off his jacket and was putting on a radiation suit. "My dear chap, I'm a Time Lord. We can take much more radiation than a human body can. Now, open the door."

Tremulously, the scientist activated the first lock. The Doctor slipped inside, then stepped through the second door as the first one closed. Moving respectfully around the reactor, he began poking, reading, and deftly working his tools.

Inside the control room, Tormon watched with apprehension. He failed to hear the soft footsteps behind him, didn't know who hit him from behind and dragged his body toward the first lock. The Time Lord didn't hear the door open, nor did he hear the sound of Tormon's body being dumped inside. The assailant left him inside the first lock, went to the control panel, and twisted a dial.

Inside the core chamber, the reactor burned hotter, and the Doctor frowned as the radiation gauge jumped. Turning, he stared at Tormon's body, just as a voice crackled over the Intercom. "Well, Doctor, this has worked out nicely. You've walked into a trap with your meddling, and I have the girl."

"You can't get away with this."

"Can't I?" The Mayor of Euphoria laughed. "You're dying, Doctor. I've won. No one, no one is going to upset Euphoria!"

* * * * *

Porter glanced up from a sheaf of papers just as Stahl rushed breathlessly into the lab. "This is wonderful!" he exclaimed. "The Doctor has found the key! With this, we can prove to Devvon that it can be done. We can bring life to the rest of our planet... Eh? What is it?"

"Devvon's men. They're coming with weapons to destroy this place."

The rebel frowned, thinking. "Alert the others! We must stop them. If they won't listen to reason, we'll have to use force."

Stahl hesitated. "They've taken the Doctor. He's in the reactor room at the plant. One of our men saw Devvon going in after him."

Porter pressed his hands to the table and glowered. "Take six men, and get to the plant! Tell the others to wait in ambush for Devvon. And hurry! If we lose the Doctor, we lose everything!"

* * * * *

Jo stumbled along wearily, testing and pushing at the barrier. Angrily, she threw herself at it once, only to bounce off with a resounding, "Ouch!" and land with a thud on the hard ground. The earth felt dry, cold, and unfriendly against her cheek. She lay motionless for a moment.

Then a soft breath of air stirred against her face. She opened her eyes to a pair of huge, round orbs that stared curiously into her own. Shrieking, she sat bolt upright, and the little animal darted into a hole in the ground, poking its round head out to peer at her inquisitively.

She giggled nervously. "Well, little furry one, I hope I didn't disturb your sleep." She dusted her pants off and approached the barrier once more, pushing and working her way around the perimeter. The little animal, looking surprisingly like a prairie dog, ambled companionably along behind her. She turned once to look at him, and grinned. He backed off a step, but stayed behind her.

"It's all right, little pup. I can do with some company. This may take a while." He snuffled at her feet, and she laughed. "Okay, come along. I have to get inside. The Doctor is probably very worried about me."

The pup sniffed, and sneezed once. The two moved on along the barrier.

* * * * *

Zippering Tormon into his own protective suit, the Doctor sighed, then turned to stare angrily at the reactor. "Well, old chap, if I can't stop this thing, nothing will protect either of us from the consequences. Nor anyone else on this planet."

He stood up. Devvon was gone, apparently satisfied he had finished off his opponents. Circling the core, which glowed and hummed more and more with each passing minute, the Time Lord reached into his pocket, produced his sonic screwdriver, and began to work, continuously wiping sweat from his forehead.

Behind him, he heard a moan as Tormon stirred, then tried to sit up. "Better to rest a moment,

old chap," he said. Before him, the reactor began to blur, and he again wiped sweat from his eyes.

"Doctor, I was...was..."

"I'm afraid so, old man."

"Who did this?"

"Devvon. He's behind it all. I can't understand why he would send a distress signal..."

"Porter sent the signal."

"Of course." The Time Lord's hand began to shake, and his eyes crossed. "Tormon, I can't... I can't...go on..." He toppled like a rag doll, and the scientist crawled to his side.

He placed his ear to the Doctor's chest. "Still beating..." he mumbled, then fumbled around the floor until he found the sonic screwdriver. He headed for the door. "I think possibly we would be helping a great deal more if we got out of here and went for help..."

He studied the strange instrument thoughtfully, then pointed it at the door. "Here goes," he said, pressing a switch.

A beam shot out, nearly knocking him off his feet, and a burning red glow appeared on the thick door.

"Too slow..." he whispered hoarsely, readjusting the device. This time, the kick was so great it knocked him across the room, straight into the reactor, which began to shudder and hum more loudly.

Tormon stared at it in horror, then scrambled for the sonic screwdriver and grabbed the Time Lord by the shoulders.

"Please, please! Wake up!" Getting no response, he collapsed on the floor in a terrified huddle.

* * * * *

Jo worked her way around the perimeter of the forest, pushing and testing every square inch of the barrier she could reach, moving her cold, tired hands slowly. Finally, with a weary sigh, she sank to the ground and buried her head in the crook of her crossed arms. The wind blew harder than ever; Ruuani's nights were bitter and cold outside the protection of the barrier.

She shivered once, and hugged herself, fighting back tears. Her little companion huddled protectively by her side. After more than an hour together, they had developed a mutual friendship.

Jo placed a hand on the animal's head and stroked his matted, coarse fur. A low rumble issued from deep within his body, and she grinned. "Why, you're purring!" she exclaimed softly, and scratched behind his ears.

He looked up at her with eyes as big as saucers.

"Well, Buddy, are you sure there's nothing you know about this that I don't? Hmm?"

In answer, the little animal waddled up to the barrier and sniffed at it. Then he put out his well-clawed paws and began to dig furiously. Within moments, he had dug a hole big enough for himself, and with a concentrated effort pushed his body through. When he popped up on the forest side, he stared at Jo with a challenging look.

She jumped to her feet. "I don't believe it!" She began to dig until her fingers ached; on the other side, her little friend tore at the ground until he had dug a hole just barely big enough for the girl to squeeze through. She grunted and slithered, and eventually found herself in the forest. "I wish I'd asked you before!"

The two of them started through the forest toward the glow of distant lights. Jo hurried as fast as her weary legs could carry her, Buddy close at her heels. When she finally broke into a clearing, she found herself at Porter's cottage. She burst in, gasping for breath.

Porter looked up in disbelief. "Miss Grant! How...?"

"Where's the Doctor?" she croaked. Then she crumpled in a heap at his feet.

* * * * *

Stahl and his comrades moved stealthily through the complex. Two of Devvon's men lay dead in front of the building. The science centre seemed deserted. A glow emanating from the vicinity of the reactor made the rebel guard frown in concern.

Pressing himself flat against a wall, he turned a corner, levelling his blaster. One of Devvon's men charged, weapon blazing. Stahl rolled to the floor, landed with a thud, and shot at the guard, who dropped with a cry.

There were no other guards. He and the rest of his men burst into the reactor room. Through the control room window, they could see Tormon's huddled body next to the inert figure of the Doctor.

"Tormon! It's Stahl! What do you want me to do?"

Shaking, the scientist got to his feet and pressed himself against the window. In halting, weak tones, he told the other man how to operate the locks.

When the door finally opened, Stahl and one of his men helped the scientist out, then dragged the Doctor to the safety of the control room. Tormon rallied enough strength to shut both doors to the reactor room.

"The rest of you, get outside and guard this complex. Let no one in, and kill any of Devvon's men if they attack." Stahl turned a concerned face to Tormon. "What else can I do?"

"Please, please, help me get the Doctor onto a pallet." That done, Tormon faced the control panel. The reactor had stabilized at a dangerous level, still a major threat to the entire planet. And he did not know how much radiation they had already absorbed. If only the Doctor could wake up and help...

* * * * *

Porter held a brimming cup to Jo's lips, and she roused enough to drink greedily and deeply. She

moaned, and her lids fluttered open. "I'm all right," she whispered. "I just need to rest..."

"Of course." He smiled sympathetically, but his eyes lacked warmth.

She had a vague, uneasy feeling. "What's happening?" She lay back against the pillow, closing her eyes.

He told her the details, as far as he knew them. "Fortunately, there are not enough of Devvon's soldiers to make a real threat against us yet. The effects of Euphoria still have a firm hold on most of the people."

She raised herself up, staring into his eyes, trying to glean information she felt he was withholding. "Then, there's a bad side to this plan of yours?"

"Fighting? Soldiering? Yes, I suppose. But isn't it always better to have the freedom to fight or not, rather than languish in an enforced lethargy?"

"Speaking of lethargy..." She yawned. "I think the Doctor's medicine is...wearing...off..." She sank back down, trying to force her eyes to stay open.

Porter fingered the cup still in his hands as he stared at her small form lying on the cot. "You just need some sleep, Miss Grant. I think everything is under control now."

But Jo was already peacefully asleep.

* * * * *

The Doctor opened his eyes and sat bolt upright, causing Tormon to jump back in surprise. He hadn't quite expected so extreme a reaction to a cup of cold water.

"Thank heaven, Doctor!" he said with a sigh of relief. "I was terribly worried."

"I'm quite all right, thank you, old chap. How about you?"

"I believe I shall survive. But what do we do about the reactor?"

The Time Lord got up and strode to the window, gazed at the reactor thoughtfully, and rubbed his chin with one finger. "Still stabilized," he murmured. "Maybe we can do something from here, without risking another trap. I believe I had just about done it before... Is there any word about Jo?"

Stahl pulled a communicator from his pocket. A moment later, they heard Porter's voice. "Yes, I have Miss Grant here. I was just about to contact you. Is the Doctor safe?"

The Time Lord held out his hand for the communicator. "How is Jo?"

"She's asleep. From the little she told me, I assume Brand kidnapped her and was going to use her as a bargaining tool. She overheard them say they had sabotaged the reactor. The barrier is behaving erratically. Holes keep appearing, then closing again. It's all happening far too fast; the reactor must be brought under control. The Ring can only do so much. Most of Devvon's men either have been captured or have taken off for their hide-out."

"We're doing what we can here."

"I have to go. Your calculations may work from this end, but I need time." Porter broke off, and the Doctor handed the communicator back to Stahl.

"And Devvon has conveniently disappeared," the Time Lord murmured.

"He can't have many men," Tormon said. "Otherwise, he'd have put a guard on us."

"Yes, precisely what I was thinking. He must have something else afoot that needs his attention. But what?" He turned to Stahl. "Can you get some men together and make a search for Devvon?"

The guard nodded and left, gun in hand.

"And now, Tormon, we have work to do."

* * * * *

Jo stirred, rolled slowly from side to side, blinked several times, and finally focused on a point on the ceiling. Propped on one elbow, she put one hand to her head and glanced around the room. Porter was gone, and the silence was eerie.

"Where is everybody?" she muttered to herself as she rose from the cot, only to sink down again to halt a wave of dizziness. Burying her head in her hands, she realized she'd been drugged. A shuffling sound caused her to raise her eyes -- straight into the muzzle of a blaster.

"Oh, no!" she groaned.

Devvon smiled thinly. Behind him, Brand struck a military pose, his gun levelled. And behind him stood Porter, the Ring in his hands.

"I don't understand..."

"You've never heard of double agents, Miss Grant? Take her to the Science Building with the others."

Brand hauled her to her feet and shoved her out the door.

"You'll never get away with this!" she said, stumbling into the darkness of the forest.

"Spare me the clichés. There is more at stake here than just one little city."

Behind Jo and her captors, a little creature like a prairie dog trailed at a discreet distance, snuffling along, nose to the ground. He stopped as they neared the city, and watched with glowing eyes. Then, with surprising speed, he back-tracked toward the outer edge of the city, and the barrier.

* * * * *

Jo was shoved unceremoniously through the door of the reactor room. The Doctor and Tormon stood side by side against the wall, hands raised. "This is getting awfully tedious, Devvon. Can't you think of something more original?" The Time Lord stared intently at the Mayor.

"One doesn't need to be original. Some methods can't be improved upon. Against the wall, Miss Grant. Now, if you will all face the wall..."

Brand advanced on the prisoners and tied their hands. "Tie the girl's especially well," Porter advised. "She's quite good with a knot."

"Do you mind telling me what this is all about?" the Doctor demanded. He winced as Brand wrenched at his bonds.

"Certainly, I can grant you that much. Porter took the Ring, and conducted his experiments apart from Tormon here. Very simple, really. I just needed to have him away from the public eye. Unfortunately, Tormon found out, so we cooked up this scheme between us, and established allies. We've been holding each other at bay for several months. Tormon was quite easily duped."

Embarrassed and dismayed, the little scientist rested his head against the wall and sighed.

"But why call me here?" the Time Lord asked.

"You, Doctor, supplied our missing link. You're quite famous around here, you know. Many of our citizens have nothing to do but watch intergalactic shows on their monitors."

"You mean like a soap opera?" Jo glanced quizzically at the Time Lord. If the situation weren't so frightening, the idea would be hilarious...

The Doctor smiled grimly. "I'm afraid so, Jo. So what do you plan to do with my calculations? There are quite a few others around vying for the title of Ruler of the Universe, you know."

Brand grabbed him and spun him around, blaster levelled under his nose. "No need to point that thing at me, old chap. I'm not going anywhere." Brand backed off.

"We are not megalomaniacs; we're just greedy." Devvon's laugh rang through the room. "Make the planet into one big Euphoria. Expand the power of the Ring, which you have so kindly helped us to do. Set up living areas. Invite other planets to spend a nice vacation, retire..."

"And have complete control over everything," the Doctor finished. "Just the same old thing, on a smaller scale."

"There's nothing wrong with starting at the bottom, is there?"

"How thoughtful," the Time Lord observed.

Porter's lips curled into a mirthless smile. "Put them in the reactor room. The radiation will finish them off. And round up the rest of the rebels, then execute them." He turned to go, but was halted by the sounds of screams and laser fire.

One of Brand's men burst into the room. "Out there... Creatures... Animals..."

Outside, a guard screamed, tearing at the creature clinging tenaciously to his throat. He gurgled as sharp fangs sank deeper; then he fell to the ground, clawing at the animal. Finally, he lay still.

The little animal, which strongly resembled a prairie dog pup, let go and waddled into the building. Ahead of him were more of his kind. Others lay dead from laser wounds. Still others attacked Brand's men. They were everywhere.

As one particular pup neared the science centre's control room, he lifted his nose into the air and sniffed. Moving slowly down the corridor, he held his head high, nose pointed upward. Besides the acrid smell of blaster fire, the strong scent of man permeated the area. He sensed fear and evil everywhere. He waddled along close to the wall, seeking one particular sweet scent, his soft paws padding almost silently.

As he started toward the control room, the little animal's eyes began to glow. The lights in the hall dimmed, and he uttered a shrill squeal that no man heard. Quickly, a dozen other pups joined him.

Inside the control room, Brand waited, flattened against the wall by the door, his blaster raised. Devon stood in one corner; Porter hovered behind the trio of prisoners. The halls and corridors were ominously silent. When the lights suddenly dimmed, Brand looked to the others, his eyes wide; a vein throbbed in his throat. Slowly, he peered around the corner of the door.

The pup lunged. Brand fired into the air, then dropped his weapon, which slid across the floor with a clatter. Shrieking, he tore at the creature clinging to his throat.

Porter put a gun to Jo's ribs and shoved her toward the door. Devon screamed as pups began to stream into the room. The false rebel opened fire at them, cutting down two before he was attacked; then he backed down the corridor, using Jo's body as a shield. One pup advanced on him steadily, his teeth bared and his eyes glowing.

"Keep moving, Miss Grant," Porter hissed. "If you want to live to see..."

Suddenly, she tripped, and shot forward onto her face. The pup immediately sprang. Porter's shot went wild, and within moments, he was struggling helplessly as the little animal tore at him.

"No!" Jo screamed. "Please! Don't kill him!"

Understanding, the pup let go, but kept the terrified man at bay with his hissing and snarling.

The girl lay helplessly on the floor for a moment, then felt the weight of a small body on her back. Something gnawed at the ropes that held her; soon, they fell away, and she sat up.

The Doctor and Tormon emerged from the control room, rubbing their chafed wrists. "Jo, are you all right?"

"Yes, Doctor, I'm just fine."

The Time Lord picked up a blaster and advanced on Porter, keeping one eye on the watching pup. "I don't know who you are," he said, addressing the latter, "But thank you."

The pup backed off and waddled to the still-seated Jo. She reached out a tentative hand and touched his head. Rumbling started from somewhere deep within him.

"It is you," she marvelled softly.

Several more of the little animals gathered around, huddling close to her body, all looking up at her with shining eyes. Surrounded by carnage, she felt pretty silly petting first one, then another. But she did it anyway, and began to giggle.

The Doctor just scratched his chin. "I can't wait to hear your story, Jo. Ah, Stahl, here, you have a prisoner. I believe Devvon is still alive, too."

"I'll see to him." He motioned to his men, who streamed into the corridor, looking for a fight, only to find a dozen or more small furry creatures surrounding Jo Grant. He opened his mouth to say something, then just shook his head, worked his way carefully around the pups, grabbed Porter by the collar, hauled him to his feet, and hustled him away.

Jo looked up at the Doctor and laughed. "I've never seen you look so perplexed! All this was almost worth just the look on your face!"

* * * *

The Time Lord sipped his tea and leaned back against the cushions of his air chair. Tormon and Stahl faced him in identical seats; both men looked relaxed and content.

"So, you're saying we should go ahead with Porter's original plan?"

"Yes, of course," the Doctor replied enthusiastically. "I think you would make a splendid scientific advisor to Stahl here. Jo's...friends are proof life can exist beyond the barrier. And you now have the calculations to expand the Ring's power."

"The reactor is finally stabilized, and will cooperate with the Ring," said Tormon, tapping his fingers on his cup.

"And Ruuanl can get back to normal," Stahl finished. "I mean normal normal."

"But, Doctor, what shall we do with Devvon and Porter?" Tormon gazed into the amber depths of his tea as if seeking an answer.

"I think between you and Stahl, you can find something productive for them." The Time Lord raised one eyebrow and smiled, draining his cup.

"And those animals..."

"Yes, fascinating creatures, aren't they? Some sort of telepathic power. Not only did they survive, but they survived well."

"Mutations, I suppose," Tormon mused.

"And good friends and allies, I should think. Well, old chaps," the Doctor said, rising, "I really must be on my way. I think you can handle things from here on."

The two men got to their feet and shook his hand. "We can't thank you enough for your help," Stahl said.

"Yes, yes. Do come visit us again, Doctor," Tormon added, bobbing his bald head. "And give our regards to Miss Grant. We will open a way for you at the same spot where you entered. Do you



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know how to find it?"

"Yes, of course. Goodbye, gentlemen."

* * * * *

The Time Lord wove his way through the forest. At Porter's old hut, now abandoned, he found Jo sitting on a stump, surrounded by several pups. She looked up and smiled wanly, then placed one hand on the head of a pup, who looked up at her with wide eyes. "I still can't tell them apart," she said, her voice tinged with regret. She scratched the animal's ears.

"We have to be going."

"Yes, I suppose so." She rose, and walked with him toward the barrier, the pups at their heels. The way was open, and soon the two companions were trudging across the barren landscape toward the familiar shape of the TARDIS.

The Doctor unlocked the door and turned to Jo, who stood a little way off. The pups had gathered together a few feet away. She stood silently, just looking at them. The Time Lord pushed the door open, then turned back.

"They're so cute," she said lamely, and wrung her hands. "Goodbye..." Waving at the little group of animals, she finally turned and made her way to the TARDIS. At the threshold, she paused once more and looked back. A warm feeling enfolded her mind, like a caressing blanket. She waved again, and entered the TARDIS.

Inside, the Doctor finished entering a new set of co-ordinates. The time rotor rose and fell, and the TARDIS disappeared from the planet of Ruuaní.

The pups watched it leave, then turned and waddled back toward their homes as though such an occurrence were a common sight.

Jo hugged herself and stared vacantly at the console. The Time Lord put his hand to her chin and lifted her head. She smiled, hugged him, then moved away.

"They were my friends," she said.

"I know."

She smiled gratefully at him. "How soon will we be home?"

"Five minutes ago," he answered with a grin.

"I'm going to lie down for a while." She disappeared into the depths of the TARDIS.

* * * * *

Inside a cupboard in one of the myriad of rooms within the TARDIS, glowing eyes peered out with a look of curiosity, friendliness, and intent purpose. Buddy waddled out, put his nose in the air, and sniffed.



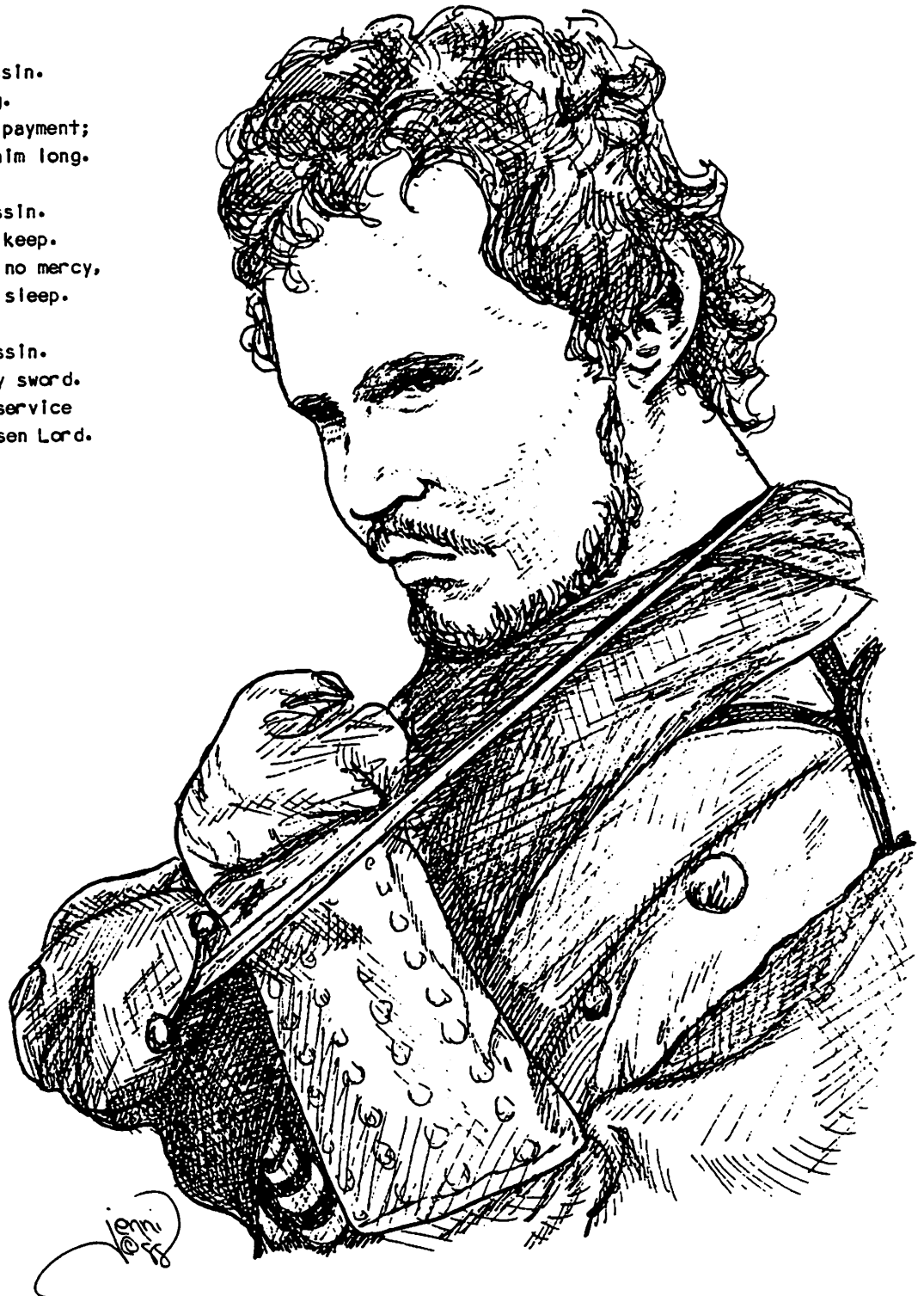
"Introduction"

(By Mary Robertson)

I am Nasir. Assassin.
To no man I belong.
Your Baron offers payment;
I will not serve him long.

I am Nasir. Assassin.
I kill to earn my keep.
I learned to show no mercy,
Else seek eternal sleep.

I am Nasir. Assassin.
They pay to own my sword.
Instead, I offer service
To Sherwood's chosen Lord.



"Ordinary Villein"

(By Jeanine Hennig)

"Ordinary lives would make them ordinary villeins..."

And what if he is right? What if those careless words, thrown out without even acknowledging whom they strike, are true?

Godwin is noble-born, noble-bred. What would he know of villeins' lives? What would he care of a peasant-turned-God's-son? Herne chose you. What more proof do you need?

I wonder...

Is it all a ride on the night-mare? Does Robin of Loxley still work at Matthew's mill, still roam the greenwood and long for that which he can never have? Born a freeman, yet never free, and never able to forget the discontent sown by a father dead long before adolescence burned in this body now mature? Is my merry band a reality? Does Marion truly lie beside me at night? It has the quality of a dream... Could an ordinary villein have what I have? But then, peasant and nobility all are alike in my kingdom...

My kingdom? Is it mine?

It is yours by right, even as Albion sings in your hands. Herne's knowledge and your own magic earned you the Divine Kingship. The Old Blood runs through you. Why do you allow careless words to stain you with doubt?

I have failed. The sword is taken, by the Abbess Morgwyn. My blood was spilt in its defence -- but still, I failed. I can feel Albion's presence. It cries out like a captive bird, cries over the cliff of Ravenscar's stone. Have I fooled myself these past years, that an ordinary villein is enough to stem the tide of wrong?

You are not an ordinary villein! You are Robin of Loxley, of Sherwood -- Robin I' th' Hood! Herne's Son, the Hooded Man. The Green Man -- Leader of the Seven of Sherwood, and Consort to the Maiden. Such things transcend any caste, any code.

But they do not stop them from binding me like an animal in the dark beneath Godwin's Hall. Even as Albion is bound, so am I...

I would rather die than be taken like this. At least there is freedom in death, and no chains to hold both body and soul. Marion knows of my capture -- I feel her spirit winging through Sherwood to rest at my side -- but it does not stop the questions. It does not quell the doubt. I have failed, and Godwin thinks me a mad fool.

All those who court the different are thought mad. All those who are different are called fools. But the real madmen are those left in the dark of their ignorance, those who refuse to believe...



Believe In what?

In the yearning, In the Quest. In the Dream...

And the living symbol of my Dream taken by evil...

No. You are yourself the living symbol of your Dream. You have failed -- but so must we all, to learn. Harken to your soul, Robin Hood, and harken to the men and the Maid who call you master. Would they give their own lives and souls to the man you fear yourself to be? Would Robin's outlaws follow an "ordinary" villein?

Never. From the start, they gave themselves to me, to my words. No matter that they would disagree or balk, there was always the giving.

Ah! Now, you begin to see!

I am no longer blinded by failure, no longer feel it clogging my throat. For I am the reality of their Dream. As Albion, and my Maiden, and my men are to me. And when this battle is done, we'll return to the forest, where peasant and noble can sup together, where a wild wolf's-head can marry a knight's daughter, where villeins who are not so ordinary after all can live free...



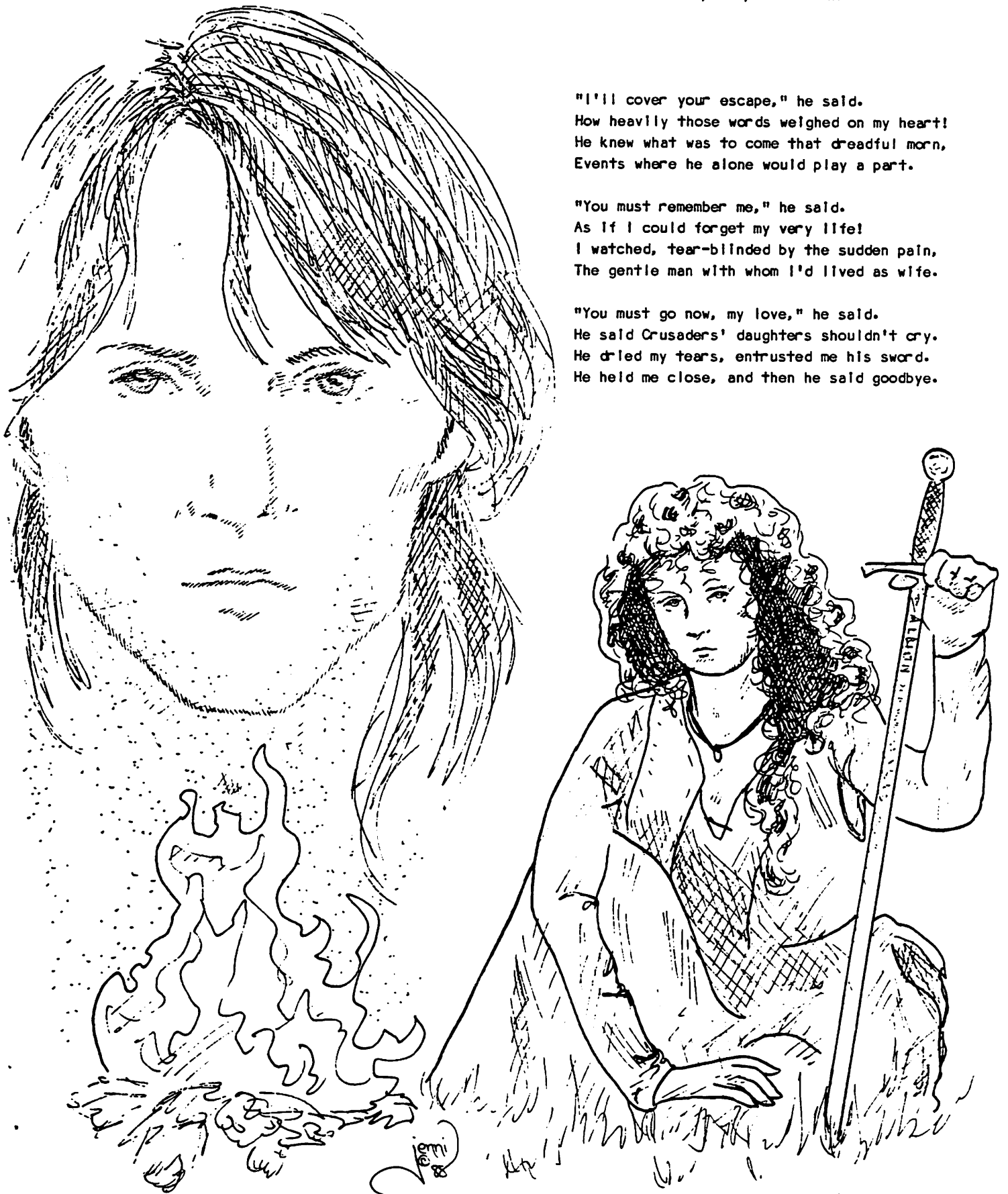
"Remembrance"

(By Mary Robertson)

"I'll cover your escape," he said.
How heavily those words weighed on my heart!
He knew what was to come that dreadful morn,
Events where he alone would play a part.

"You must remember me," he said.
As if I could forget my very life!
I watched, tear-blinded by the sudden pain,
The gentle man with whom I'd lived as wife.

"You must go now, my love," he said.
He said Crusaders' daughters shouldn't cry.
He dried my tears, entrusted me his sword.
He held me close, and then he said goodbye.



"Doctor Who and the Lacertian Raiders"

(By Barbara Mater)

The city busses were running late one snowy evening in Syracuse, New York, as Kelsie left work at the discount store and crossed the street to join the crowd waiting for them in front of the peanut shop on Salina Street. The wind flapped her thin slacks around her ankles. She shoved her fists deeper into the pockets of her ski jacket and stamped her feet, looking with envy at the long coat and high boots on the girl standing in front of her.

Her feet must be nice and warm... Kelsie's weren't. The sensible shoes she wore at work were becoming indistinguishable from the old ones she wore outdoors, except for moisture content.

Four busses lined up at the stop, but none was the right one. Kelsie sighed and stepped back into a slightly warmer position in the middle of the crowd, her mouth watering at the smell of roasting nuts from the store. Two more busses marked "EXPRESS" whizzed by, spraying dirty slush on the people at the curb. A teen-age boy with a boom box on his shoulder shook his fist at the bus, cursing the driver and the snow.

At last, an older bus, its illuminated sign cracked and almost illegible, rolled up to the stop. Kelsie squinted in the darkness, straining to read the sign. She sighed again. It was her bus.

She climbed in, paid with her last token, and found a seat. Bless the Midstate Transit Company, even if it's going to cost me all my change to ride back to work tomorrow and pick up my pay...

She could hear the boy with the radio laughing and talking to another boy in the seat behind her. Across the aisle, a stout housewife shuffled packages and scolded her small daughter. "Sit still, I told you! You gonna fall down!"

Two girls in high school jackets and knitted caps giggled and snapped their chewing gum, waving to someone outside on the walk.

Kelsie coughed into a crumpled pink tissue. Queasy with post-nasal drip, she hoped she could stay on her feet in the morning, and make it until her day off. She closed her eyes and thought about supper. No money for a hamburger, but I still have a boxed pizza mix in the cupboard. Pizza would taste good. I can almost smell it...

The bus lurched to a stop, skidding on an icy patch and bumping through a row of pot-holes. The imaginary pizza odour was dispelled by the intrusion of a weirdly sharp, pungent smell as two more passengers boarded the bus. Their large, lumbering forms were clad in overcoats and ski masks, and one held something shiny, half-covered by a paper bag. He sidled up to the driver, but no coins or tokens fell into the box.

What have they been drinking, to make them reek like that? Or maybe they work in a chemical factory... The smell was nauseating. They have to be crazy to try and hijack a city bus, especially this old crate!

But Kelsie was sure that's what they were up to. The driver was arguing with the one in front, who pulled the paper bag off his gun and leaned forward threateningly. The other one menaced the passengers with a similar weapon, a six-sided cylinder with a grid across the business end. So they're not your average winos. Maybe they're weapons freaks...

The school girls, seeing the gun, dived out the back door of the bus just as the driver put the engine in gear. The woman across from Kelsie grabbed her packages and followed them out into the snowy night, clutching her little girl, as the bus began to move.

Kelsie got up to follow. But by then, they were in traffic, and it was too late. The boy with the boom box challenged the intruder. "Hey, man, what you think you doin'?" But the strange gun sprayed orange sparks across his face, and he backed off. "Ow! Man, what was that? Wow, I c'n hardly see! What's a matter with you guys?"

The hijacker advanced menacingly down the aisle and stood in front of the door. Kelsie almost gagged from the smell of him. Then she stifled a scream as she looked down for the first time and saw his feet.

He wore no boots. His feet were long, covered with grey scales, and they bore four clawed toes each. They left gooeey spots on the already wet and dirty floor of the bus.

Am I having a nightmare? What's under the ski masks? Do I really want to know?

The bus did not follow its usual route, but went onto the expressway and picked up speed as it left the city, northbound toward the airport. Home was getting farther away. Kelsie peered longingly out the window toward the street where she lived. Time seemed to stand still as she struggled with her own disbelief in what was happening.

When they finally stopped by a farm on a secondary road, the hijackers began unloading the bus. First, they shoved the driver, a thin little man with grey hair, out into the darkness. Then they dragged the boys with the radio out, and Kelsie heard one of them say, "Ho-o-o-lee! I don' believe it!"

Then they came back for her. "You don't have to grab me! I'm going!" she cried as one of the creatures reached toward her, revealing claws where most people had fingers. But he grabbed her anyway, and shoved her out the door. She jumped down from the step and landed in deep, cold mud, nearly dropping her purse.

Across the stubbly cornfield was a large machine that looked like a military tank. Where the gun should have been was a six-sided cone about two metres in diameter, glowing orange at the open end. A white light pulsed atop the turret. The bus driver, the two boys, and Kelsie were shoved over the rough ground toward the machine.

About half-way across the field, the two boys made a break, running in opposite directions. Fire from the tank's cone struck down the one with the radio. There was a loud popping sound as orange sparks struck him. He spun partway around, then fell face down in a flooded furrow.

The other boy had stopped, and stood staring at his friend, uncertain whether to run or go to help him. The tank weapon decided for him. Orange sparks flew out of the cone, striking him with the same loud popping sound. He stood for a moment, outlined darkly against the orange fire, then fell, his face up to the sky, snow melting on his face.

Kelsie and the driver went quietly.

Her chest was tight with the horror of what she had seen, and fear of what lay ahead. Kelsie was puzzled by the driver's apparent lack of fear. He seemed fascinated by the machine itself. The creatures shoved them up a ladder, through a hatch.

"It's a flyin' saucer" the old man said softly, pausing on the hard grey ramp leading down from the hatchway into the brightly lighted interior of the machine. "An honest-to-God flyin' saucer! Whaddya think, girly?" He turned to her for the first time. "Ain't this somethin', though?"

A blow from one of the creatures sent him staggering. Kelsie, numb with fear, was nudged forward, into a room where there were several large cushioned seats, seemingly designed for creatures the size of their captors. The two humans were shoved into adjacent seats; the hijackers sat in two others. After a moment, there was a noise like ten thousand pounds of jelly slurping out of its jar, and the craft lifted free of the muddy field and started to move away from Earth.

* * * * *

In the TARDIS control room, the Doctor was on his hands and knees taking apart some of the circuitry under the instrument panel. Frost rimmed the panel and sparkled in his thick, curly hair. Icicles hung from the console's control knobs. The Time Lord's coat collar was turned up against the cold, and his multi-coloured scarf was wound thickly around his neck. It was so cold in the TARDIS that his breath hung foggily in the air.

He looked pretty dishevelled, and tools were scattered on the floor, attesting to a long afternoon of hard work already past. "You know, K-9," he said to the little computer-dog, "when I started spring cleaning, I had no idea what I was getting into. Would you hand me those crimpers over there? No, not the small ones. The larger ones, just there. Thank you, K-9."

Having fetched the crimpers, K-9 remarked in his usual helpful and informative way, "Correction, Master. Spring cleaning is done in the spring. Earth area we are approaching is now experiencing winter, a season of cold and long nights. Temperatures may range from..."

"I don't want a weather report! I just want to get this job done! There, I think that's got it!" He pushed a button atop the console, and a soft hum began. The Doctor grinned, showing large white teeth. "Ah, now we should have some heat!"

* * * * *

As soon as the acceleration ended, the scaly creatures prodded Kelsie and the bus driver to get up. She obeyed as well as she could, but when the driver tried to stand, he fell back into the chair, white-faced, clutching his chest. The alien shook him.

"He's sick, you fool!" Kelsie shouted. "I think he's having a heart attack!" She fumbled in his shirt pocket for pills, but found none. "Where's his jacket?" She was terrified the old man would die and leave her alone with the aliens.

One of them started to drag her away; the other kept pummeling the driver, who gasped for air.

"Stupid creatures! He's going to die if you don't let me help him!" But they dragged her off.

She cried herself to sleep that night in the empty room where they left her.

* * * * *

Because she always remembered to wind her watch, and because every time it said twelve she made a pencil mark on an old envelope from her purse, Kelsie knew it was nine days before anything changed. During that time, she was forced to clean and re-clean the aliens' quarters endlessly, with some sort of contraption that looked like a rug steamer and left a damp, sticky residue that smelled almost as bad as the creatures themselves. Every surface was ugly, grey, and hard -- where they walked, where they ate, where they rested. And every surface had to be cleaned, over and over.

At first, she protested. "Hey, don't I even get protective clothing? What if this stuff is toxic to humans? And how about cleaning me? Where are the showers?"

They didn't pay much attention. But every time she collapsed on the job, they placed her back in the big chair. And every time she woke up, she found a cup of water and a dish of something like soggy bread to eat.

There was never any more sign of the bus driver. Poor guy. Maybe he's lucky, in a way... She wondered how much longer her captivity would go on. Her cold was worse; she coughed constantly. And the aliens had made a deep scratch across her back and left shoulder, which was sore and swollen.

Kelsie was utterly miserable.

* * * * *

Once the TARDIS was defrosting, the Doctor put away his repair kit and got himself a mug of tea, then stood at the control console, punching in a set of co-ordinates. The central column began to move normally, but just as the last number was entered, the room suddenly slipped sideways, spilling tea on the floor and producing a flashing of lights on the panel. "Whoops! I guess she wasn't quite ready. That's annoying. All the systems looked to be in order. How curious, eh, K-9?"

With a bump, the TARDIS came to a halt. "Now, where do you suppose we are? Shall we have a look around? Odd the view screen's blank. Looks all solid grey."

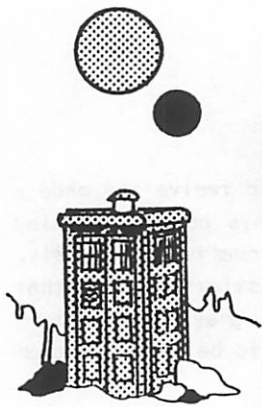
The Time Lord opened the door. "Whew, what's that smell? It's awful! But it's familiar, too... Do you recognize it, K-9?"

K-9 turned his back and slid as far as possible into the most remote corner of the room, where he stubbornly remained.

The Doctor stepped into a damp grey room filled with a lot of damp grey containers.

* * * * *

Kelsie had just finished her poor excuse of a breakfast, after making the eighteenth pencil mark on her envelope, when she heard the door open. But instead of an evil-smelling lizard creature, there was a tall man with curly hair and oddly-assorted clothes. His attire included a long, colourful scarf.



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He smiled as if in great delight and announced, "Hello! I'm the Doctor. I've come to take you home!"

She blinked in confusion. Who is this character? And is "home" going to be his place or mine? Oh, well, who cares, as long as there aren't any more lizard creatures there... She stood up, stiffly. "I'm Kelsie."

"Quick, now, before the aliens spot us," he warned, and led her through a cargo hatch into a hold, where a large blue box marked "POLICE" stood. She couldn't help doing a double-take. Looks like a phone booth...

The strange man ushered her inside the box, and she almost dropped her purse in surprise. This is no ordinary phone booth...!

For a minute or two, she just stared around the room, examining its white walls, its control console, and the coat rack against the wall. Then she spotted K-9. "Hey, what a nifty mechanical dog!" she exclaimed. "I bet Toys and Hobbies could sell a bunch of these at Christmas!"

K-9 did not reply.

The Time Lord shut the door and operated some instruments on the large and complicated control panel. With a peculiar wheezing, groaning sound like the trumpeting of a spring-wound elephant, the engine began to function.

"Now, then, I think we're safely away. You can put your things in there," he said, indicating a wall locker. "And won't you come and have a chat with me about your adventure?"

Kelsie felt very strange indeed. Her recent experiences were overwhelmingly unfamiliar, yet this strange man seemed to take the whole business in stride. He sounded English. She knew English technology was extremely good, but had never heard they had spaceships that looked like phone booths. "Are you from England?" she asked, following him into a small sitting room furnished with a couch, some chairs, and a little table.

"Oh, part of the time," he smiled. "Here, won't you have a seat? I'll get some refreshments."

Should I really sit on that nice clean couch in my slimy clothes? Oh, well, I don't have any others, and I'm very tired... She sat down.

The Doctor came back in a moment or two with a tray of sandwiches and two bottles of ginger beer. Kelsie sipped ginger beer and told her story. "It was just awful. I couldn't believe the things they did. They shot those poor boys for running away, and just left them lying there. And they wouldn't let me help the bus driver. They just didn't seem to care if we lived or died."

"Quite typical of the Lacertans." He frowned. "That's what they are, you know. Lizard people from the Lacerta Gamma system." He offered her another sandwich. "They are certainly some of the most heartless beings I've run across. No moral sense at all, no regard for the rights and needs of others. Any slaves who can't work, they just toss aside like old boots. Oh, I am sorry..."

Her eyes were brimming. She looked for a clean spot on her sleeve but couldn't find one. On the table was a stack of paper cocktail napkins stamped "Seattle World's Fair"; she took one to wipe her eyes.

The Time Lord put a kindly hand on her shoulder, and noticed the wound the Lacertans had made. "They've hurt you, too, haven't they? Let's have a look at that."

He went back to the control room and got a first aid kit. As he swabbed some lotion on her shoulder, she kept talking, trying to block out the pain. "The worst part, I think, was being alone. Nobody to talk to, no one at all for company but those nasty creatures. I don't think I could have gone on much longer if you hadn't shown up." Oh, no! I'm going to cry...

Oh, no! She's going to cry! But then, who could blame her...? "I know," he said softly. "Space can be lonely." And in a moment, she was crying in his arms.

When she found her voice again, she asked, "How did you find me, anyway?"

"Well, we just sort of dropped by accidentally, and when we saw we were in a Lacertan craft, I suspected there would be slaves on board. K-9 detected a human life form -- you. Although he wouldn't come along on the rescue. He's been rather out of sorts lately. I think he's bored. Computers like to have lots of numbers to chew on, you know."

"Computers?"

"Yes, of course." He led her into the control room. "K-9's a very special dog, you see. He's often a great help to me."

Although this was said quite loudly for K-9's benefit, the computer-dog gave no sign of having heard.

Suddenly, the TARDIS jolted to a halt. The Doctor checked his instruments and activated the view screen. There was nothing but static.

Kelsie stepped in. "What's happened? I didn't know there were pot-holes in space."

The Time Lord looked at the screen, annoyed. "Something has interrupted our transition through relative-dimensional time," he growled, adjusting a dial.

Another bump threw them off balance for a moment. Then the view screen cleared, and two Lacertan tank-ships appeared, their cones aimed at the TARDIS. "I thought it was too easy an escape. It seems we have an escort." Examining the co-ordinates display on the control panel, he announced, "We are being towed toward the Lacertan system by a powerful two-dimensional force beam. I think it's going to be a rather unpleasant ride."

"How does this, uh, ship of yours work?" Kelsie asked, thinking of the massive freighters and mighty Great Lakes tugs she had once seen at Oswego. "Can she overcome the force beam?"

"It's not easy to explain," he answered, shrugging. "And, no, I don't think we can, because if we were to dematerialize at this point, our molecules would be scattered in two directions by the two-dimensional forces of the beam."

"That sounds bad."

"Mmm, could be difficult to get ourselves together again. Like Humpty Dumpty, you know."

"What can we do?"

"What can we do? We can think! If we stop this chattering, that is." And he sat down on the floor, put his chin in his hands, and began to recite multiplication tables. "One times one is one, one times two is two..."

K-9 swivelled his ears and turned to look up at Kelsie, who tipped an eyebrow philosophically at him. There was no interfering with the Doctor, however nonsensical he acted.

"...forty-two!" pronounced the Time Lord decisively. "Now, I know what to do. Borusa always said," and he intoned in his best Serious Time Lord voice, "'It is no shame not to know something. But be sure that you know where to look it up.'" Then he returned to his everyday voice. "K-9, come here, boy. We've got some real work to do."

The computer-dog ambled toward him. "Master?"

"Listen, K-9, I've just realized what we must do." K-9's ears swivelled again, with a whirring sound. "I know a chap who's sure to have the information we need to escape from the Lacertans, and perhaps to stop their marauding, too, at least for a while. But to get in touch with him, we'll need to dust off the long distance radio." He knelt by the control panel and unfastened a cover on one side, using his sonic screwdriver.

"What are you doing?" Kelsie asked.

"Repairs."

She sighed. "Will you need me?"

"Don't think so. K-9's here."

"Then, can I go get cleaned up?"

"Certainly. First door on the right, down two flights, left, left, left, right again, and you can't miss it."

She went out, repeating the directions to herself.

The Doctor went to work wiping off the contents of the console base. "Drat! My scarf's caught on a wire." He gave it a good tug, and a humming sound began. A shelf of electronic components slowly slid out, and lights began to blink in a row down one side of the apparatus. "Now, let's see. Wires are loose all over the place. Got to find the schematic." He rummaged in his pockets, but found only a yo-yo and a bag of jelly babies. He ate one of the jelly babies and put the rest away.

Then he went to the wall locker and began to putter around. He had quite a pile of junk on the floor by the time Kelsie came back, wearing clean clothes and with her hair much tidier. She pulled her purse from the junk pile and began searching in it.

"Ah, here we are," the Time Lord said, holding up a tattered sheet of paper. He set it on the floor alongside the console, and began rearranging the wires to match the diagram.

After checking her appearance in her compact mirror, Kelsie went to stand behind him. She kept

looking over his shoulder, first on one side, then the other, trying to see what he was doing. "What would happen if you attach that green wire to the pin with the green dot?"

"Where?" He frowned at the tangled wires.

She reached around him. "Right here, see? That long wire that's hanging down under the shelf..."

"I can't work with you pestering me!" he exclaimed. "And since when do shop girls know anything about electronics? Honestly, you humans are just about the most audacious people I know. Go and clean up that stuff!" He pointed to the pile of junk by the locker, and the contents of her purse, also scattered on the floor.

Kelsie made a face at his back, then sat down by the locker to sulk. "K-9!" she whispered, and the computer-dog went to her. "Why did he say, 'you humans' to me? Isn't he human, too?"

"Master is somewhat more than human. Not of Earth origin. Details are classified."

She pondered this revelation while the Time Lord struggled with the circuit boards. He held a micro-chip up to the light, examining it with a large round magnifying glass. "Seems to be all right. Must be this bit in here, where the circuit's burnt out... Haven't got a bit of wire, have you, Kelsie?"

"How about a paper clip?" she asked stiffly, not looking at him.

"Might do very nicely." He accepted the paper clip and snipped a short length from it, which he carefully placed in the gap on the circuit board. "K-9, spot-weld."

The computer-dog obligingly zapped the circuit with a beam of red light. Smoke curled up from the board. When it cleared, the Doctor pronounced the operation a success. He motioned to K-9, who plugged his sensor probe into the console.

"Now, K-9, stand by to enter code for standard space radio communications transmission, civilian frequency. T0394862147WD addressing R106502121972BZ. Got it? Good. Right. Enter code."

After a few seconds of silence, during which lights flashed on the circuit board shelf, a faint and far-away voice came whining out of a speaker on the control panel. "HEART OF GOLD. Good afternoon, whoever you are, or at least I dare to hope you're having a better time than I am, not that anybody cares how I feel, I..."

"Digressions are irrelevant," K-9 snapped. "My Master wishes urgently to communicate with your commander."

"Marvin, you old so-and-so, why didn't you tell me we had a phone call!" came a hearty voice from the speaker. At the same time, the Doctor's view screen flickered to life, and a man's image appeared through the static.

Kelsie was astounded. He had two heads, and three arms. The head that spoke was very alert-looking and had a wildly cheerful expression; she found it irresistibly appealing. The other head was underdeveloped and malformed, and looked sleepy. One arm rested on something in front of him, probably the controls for his screen. Another ended in a hand holding a glass filled with ice cubes and some shimmering gold liquid. The third arm was cosily wrapped around a fair-haired young woman, who looked at them with great curiosity.

"Doctor! I'm delighted!" the wakeful head shouted. "Well, I must say you're looking fit. Doesn't he look fit, Trillian? Yes, I like your present form."

"Thank you, Zaphod. Yours is something new and marvellous, too. Must be quite useful. I always say, two heads are better than one. Don't I always say that, K-9?"

They both laughed loudly. The man on the screen went on. "Well, now, where's the party? I'm sure you didn't phone me for nothing, eh?"

"I'm afraid there's no party just now. In fact, we're in a spot of trouble."

"Oh, what a shame! I've really been meaning to get hold of you, but you're so hard to find! What's the matter, and is there anything I can do?" Trillian handed him her cigarette, and he took a long pull on it. "Whhh-fff-thpp!"

"It seems we are in tow between a pair of Lacertan slavers. Most embarrassing, as we don't really want to go with them."

"Ahhh! Thank you, Trillian. Well, Doctor, correct me if I am wrong," said Zaphod's active head, while the passive one rolled its eyes in a beautiful dream. "But the Lacertans don't have a very complex technology, I think. They're probably using a two-dimensional force beam."

"Yes, that's right."

"In which case, since the two dimensions act with a negative vortex effect on their object, which is already travelling in at least four dimensions at once, relative to the theoretically stable centre of the universe, as well as any given mathematically determinable point in the cosmos... Uh, where was I, Marvin?"

"Travelling in at least four dimensions," answered the computer, sounding bored and sarcastic.

"Doctor," Kelsie interrupted, beckoning him out of range of the screen and microphone, "how can your friend just sit there and get stoned when our lives are in danger?"

"For your information, Zaphod is probably the second most intelligent being in the universe, even when he's stoned, and if you're in trouble, he's worth six of most people," said the Time Lord in a tone of gentle reproof, mixed with amusement.

"Okay, Doctor," said the two-headed entity, "even if I were to succeed in ripping your TARDIS away from the force beam, which it's improbable even I could do, the odds are four hundred thirty two to one that your ship would be blown to bits. Alternatively, I could board one of the alien ships and try to turn off one dimension of the beam, which would make it pretty easy for you to get away by dematerialization. Shall I try?" he offered eagerly.

"Do you think you can do it?"

"I think I can do anything! Cogito, ergo...something or other." He stood, spilling both his drink and Trillian. "Hey, who's your lady?" he asked, noticing Kelsie.

"Just a friend I ran into. Say, before you go, could you just get out that reference book of yours and look up the Lacertans for me? I'd like to know something about them, their strengths

and weaknesses, their habitat, and so on."

"Of course, of course!" Zaphod reached up out of view for a moment, and brought out something that looked like a pocket video game. He pushed a few buttons on it and frowned. "Well, you've got yourself into a nice mess this time. Those guys are bad. They enslave other races to do menial work so they can have technology without labour, and they have no loyalties. Ah, here's something! It says that, like most life forms, they cannot exist in an environment of their own waste, and since they exude slime, they have a real house-cleaning problem. They don't like to clean up after themselves, so they snare humans to be their captive cleaners."

"Yes, yes, I know that already," the Time Lord said, thinking hard.

Zaphod suddenly giggled and took on a conspiratorial tone. "Now, Doctor, just suppose now, heh-heh, suppose I were to bring along a bottle of gin and dump it into their cleaning stuff, eh? They'd absorb the alcohol and get sloshed, wouldn't they? Hah-ha-ha, wouldn't that be something to see? And then I could sneak into the control room -- assuming I can find the control room -- and turn off the force beam -- always assuming I can find the force beam! Hah-ha-ha!" He whooped for joy, then waggled his eyebrows at Kelsie. The screen went dark.

"Oh, Doctor, is he likely to do it?"

"More likely than anyone else I know. He's done some remarkably improbable things."

* * * * *

Trillian got up off the floor, sat down next to Zaphod, and pouted. "Do you really have to go? I mean, it's clear there's practically no hope. Why should you risk your life for some poor chap who doesn't know when he's licked?"

Zaphod leaned his heads back, blew a couple of smoke rings, followed by a figure eight and a double helix. "Trillian," he said softly, "if you knew him, you wouldn't ask. The Doctor is probably the second most intelligent being in the cosmos, and even though he doesn't party half enough, when there's trouble he's worth six of most people." So saying, he kissed her goodbye, and put on his space suit and helmets. He went to a docking area at the rear of HEART OF GOLD and climbed into a small two-man shuttle, then whooshed away into dark space.

* * * * *

The Doctor stood at a work table in the TARDIS's chemical laboratory, measuring liquid from a large container. "What are you doing?" Kelsie asked.

"Whiling away the time it will take to get to Lacerta Gamma Two by checking out an idea of Zaphod's."

She rolled her eyes. "What idea?"

"I'm testing the residue of Lacertan slime from your old clothes to see if it reacts with certain chemicals."

"What sort of chemicals?" She sniffed disapprovingly.

He tapped the large container. "Principally, gin."

* * * * *

On board the Lacertan ship, Zaphod climbed through the interior airlock. In two of his hands, he held a pocket laser knife and a half-gallon bottle. With the other hand, he felt his way along the wall.

The corridor was empty. He hesitated briefly at a corner, then shrugged and went straight on. A shuffling sound came from ahead; he ducked into a side hallway as two Lacertans lumbered past. Then, pinching his noses, he followed their slime trail to a locked door.

As he attempted to laser through the lock, a slave approached with a cleaning machine. He was a little fellow with a flowing black moustache, and he looked up at Zaphod in astonishment. The two-headed being removed a helmet and asked him where to find the control room.

"We're there," the little man answered. "What are you up to?"

"Sabotage," he replied with a wicked grin. The little man's eyes lit up.

Zaphod opened the bottle, and they both had a drink, then set about opening the door. The little man had a ring of keys, so it was only a matter of finding the right one. They were quickly inside.

The control room was a puzzle. Everything was grey, just like the corridors outside -- buttons, dials, levers, wires, equipment housing, instruments, walls, ceiling, floor.

"Of course! I forgot they are colour-blind! So why would they use colour coding? All the signal lights are white, and all the printed instructions are in Lacertan, a language so difficult and rarely used that even I am unfamiliar with it. Ah, well, let's see what we can do." He rubbed his hands together in anticipation, then began lasering things at random. Lights winked, smoke poured out of cracks in the panels, and pretty soon an alarm sounded. "We're out of luck now," he sighed.

The little slave nudged his arm. "How about another drink? Might be our last."

"Not time to give up yet, man!" He started running down a corridor away from the control room. The slave followed.

At the first corner, four Lacertans converged ponderously on them. Zaphod began flinging gin all over the place. "Smells better than you guys do!" he yelled at the aliens.

The Lacertans slipped and slid in the puddles of gin, and floundered around trying to get up. Zaphod and the little slave, who was chuckling in delight, beat it back to the shuttle and got safely away.

"Too bad about the force beam," Zaphod muttered. "I did my best."

* * * * *

Steam rose lazily from the thick, bubbly swamps of Lacerta Gamma Two. Weird vegetation rustled as small creatures came and went. Something like a bird called high in the wet, odorous air. Some things like crickets sang in the weeds around the metal dome where Lacertans slithered to and fro,

their slime continually washed away by a primitive sprinkler system powered by the labour of several human slaves walking around a windlass-like wheel inside the dome. Now and then, one of the slaves would drop out for a few moments, until a Lacertan guard came and whacked him back into place.

One man didn't get up. He was dragged away and tossed into the swamp. Even as he fell, the guard looked up to see two of his people's ships landing, a blue box trapped between them. He nodded in satisfaction. More slaves would be aboard.

"Too bad about the force beam," the Doctor muttered. "I'm sure Zaphod did his best." The view screen showed a Lacertan beckoning them to emerge from the TARDIS.

"No, thank you." The Time Lord shook his curly head, then punched the dematerialization switch. Nothing happened. "Darn! Stuck again!"

Three other Lacertans joined the first one, and they began shoving the TARDIS toward the edge of the landing platform. Below them was an oozing, bubbling, bottomless swamp.

"All right, all right! We'll come out!" the Doctor shouted. "K-9, hide in here, and don't let anybody in until we get back." He opened the door and stepped out.

He and his companion were immediately seized by Lacertans and escorted into the dome. One guard hauled Kelsie off to take the empty place at the wheel. Another pushed the Doctor into a small room where a large Lacertan reclined on a platform, surrounded by several others. Here, as everywhere in their environment, all was grey, hard, and damp.

The Time Lord took the initiative. "Hello, I'm the Doctor. Look, I hope you'll understand this is all a dreadful mistake..."

The big alien lifted its head importantly and spoke into a microphone attached to a box on a stand in front of its platform. His guttural rumblings and clickings were clearly audible, but at the same time, English words issued from a speaker mounted in the box. "So, Doctor, we meet at last. You have sought to deprive me of my slaves, whose efforts are needed to sustain my people."

"Your people would be perfectly capable of sustaining themselves, and you know it, if they weren't so sluggishly lazy. No imagination, either, I see. Your sense of decor is absolutely abysmal -- everything monochromatic grey! Ugh! Don't you think a bit of blue here, a splash of vermillion... No?"

"What is blue? What is..." The machine hesitated. "...vermillion?"

"Why, they're colours! Doesn't that audiotronic translator explain English words? I certainly hope it can, as Lacertan is a language so difficult to understand and so rarely used that even I am unfamiliar with it."

"The notion of so-called 'colours' is a superstitious belief, unsuitable for reasonable beings. Doctor, you have brought me much trouble and inconvenience. An ally of yours has tampered with one of my ships, and poisoned four of my guards. Have you anything to say for yourself?"

"Care for a jelly baby?"

The lizard regarded him without expression, slime oozing from between its scales. "A special

punishment is awaiting you. It is what we do for our particular enemies. I am told you are intelligent. Perhaps you will be amused. A maze has been constructed just for you, a maze with invisible walls. Does that sound interesting? A maze whose shape changes constantly. A few have escaped, a very few. Others have gone mad. Most have died."

A Lacertan seized the Time Lord by the arms, and he winced as their sharp claws dug in. "Can't we talk this over?" he asked. "Can't you chaps ever learn to do for yourselves, instead of depending on humans? Everyone knows how unreliable they are, after all..."

"Silence!" commanded the alien leader. Then it gestured, and the Doctor was dragged down a corridor to a closed door. The guards opened it and pushed him through. On the other side was a steep chute down to the level below, a drop of about three metres. The Time Lord landed awkwardly, struck his head, and lay still.

* * * * *

In the wheel room, Kelsie obediently fell into step with the three men and one other woman there. They walked round and round, pumping blue liquid from a tank in the corner up into the sprinkler pipes that ran all over the dome. When the guard left the room for a moment, she heard somebody behind the tank go, "Psst!"

She looked around and saw a man with two heads peeking out. The Doctor's friend, the one with the encyclopaedic video game!

The little slave in front of her seemed to recognize him, too. "Hi, there, mate! Did you get the stuff in the tank?"

Zaphod triumphantly held up an empty gin bottle. "Aren't you the Doctor's girl friend?" he asked, spotting Kelsie at the wheel.

"He rescued me," she sighed, "but then the lizards got us again."

"I heard about it." He nodded both heads. "Where is he?"

"I don't know," she moaned. "It looks like we're stuck here."

A big slave behind her spoke up. "They'll have taken your friend to the maze."

"The maze?" she asked.

"Yeah. A special treat they save up for people they really hate."

"What's it like?" Zaphod demanded.

"A laser maze. Can't be solved. Keeps changin'."

"How does it do that?"

"Because of the randomizer. It changes the projection all the time."

"How come you know so much about it?" asked the little slave from the Lacertan ship.

"Because they stole it off me when I was captured," the big man replied. "Maze did this, see?" He showed them his scarred legs. "Burns, these are."

"Shh! Here comes the guard!"

A Lacertan lumbered into the room and over to the tank of blue liquid, grumbling to itself in its native language. Zaphod hid while it poked at the controls above the tank. Kelsie figured the aliens must already be feeling the effects of the gin.

Suddenly, the creature spotted Zaphod and grabbed him. Kelsie, the big slave, and the little man with the moustache rushed to help, but were knocked down by the lizard's tail. The other slaves kept hopelessly pushing the wheel.

The Lacertan overpowered Zaphod and took him out. After they were gone, Kelsie asked urgently, "How can we get them out of the maze?" The big slave scratched his head. "Come on, come on! We can get away in the TARDIS if we can just get him free!"

"TARDIS? What's a TARDIS?"

"Never mind. Where's the maze?"

They crept out of the wheel room, the other slaves following, and went down a long, damp, grey corridor. "Down there," the big man said at last, pointing toward a door.

"Where's it controlled from?" Kelsie demanded.

"Back there." He indicated another door.

"How about you going in there and getting your randomizer back, while we check on the Doctor?"

He agreed. "But the control room's locked!" he added mournfully.

"No problem!" The little man with the moustache still had the keys he'd used on the Lacertan ship. "One of these is bound to fit."

Kelsie opened the door to the maze. Just inside was a steep chute into a dim room where beams of red and white light played in an ever-changing pattern. Somebody stumbled around in the darkness, trying to get out. "Doctor! Stay still!"

She heard a scuffle from the corridor behind her, as the Lacertans caught up with the runaways. A guard fired his cone gun, and one slave fell, wounded. Determined to help the Time Lord, Kelsie slid down into the maze.

It was dark, hot, and dusty. The light beams shifted constantly, burning her unexpectedly. The injuries weren't enough to disable, but they did hurt. It would take a long time to die of exhaustion, running with no direction.

"It's only the red beams that burn," Zaphod's voice called from the shadows. "Remember, they're colour-blind. They don't even know the laser's red!" He chuckled. Then, "Ouch!" he yelped as a red beam caught him.

"How are we going to get out of here?" the Doctor asked.



—> GENNIE SUMMERS '88

"The men are trying to disconnect the randomizer," Kelsie explained.

The pattern shifted, and the three prisoners all backed up at once, crashing into one another and falling into the path of the laser beam. "Ouch!" they all cried at once.

The door opened above them, and the little slave appeared. "He's in the control room now!" A guard loomed behind him, and he ran, orange sparks showering around him.

Kelsie, Zaphod, and the Doctor picked themselves up just as the laser pattern shifted again. Then, suddenly, the red beams switched off. The big slave had gotten his randomizer back.

The Time Lord boosted Kelsie up to the doorway, then tossed his scarf up to her. She had knotted it firmly around a pipe and tossed the free end back down when the guards appeared.

The big slave stuck his head out of the control room, pulled her inside, then slammed and locked the door. The Lacertans began beating against it. "Thanks for turning off the laser," she said, breathlessly, leaning on the control panel. "But what about those creatures?"

On a wall was a large dial marked "SPRINKLER." The man turned it up all the way, and a hissing sound came from the corridor. Unfortunately, it also came from the overhead pipes, and blue cleaning solution mixed with gin fell like rain, all over Kelsie and the slave -- and all over the Lacertans in the hallway.

"Phew!" Kelsie spit as a drop ran into her mouth. "Nasty stuff!"

At that moment, the door fell open; the guards had succeeded in battering it down. But those same guards sprawled in a heap on the floor, overcome by the alcoholic taint of the sprinklers.

"Come on!" Kelsie grabbed the slave's arm, and they ran down the corridor, with the Doctor, Zaphod, and the rest of the slaves right behind them. They dodged guards all the way back to the landing platform.

The TARDIS stood next to Zaphod's shuttle. "Can you take these fellows in your machine?" Zaphod asked.

"Of course. K-9! Let us in!"

The little computer-dog opened the door, and the Doctor ushered all the humans inside.

"This calls for a party! Meet me in the HEART OF GOLD!" Zaphod invited heartily. He slipped into his spacesuit and helmets, then climbed into his little shuttle. As soon as he was away, the Time Lord took off.

Safe in the TARDIS, Kelsie sat wearily on the control room floor. "Where are the slaves?" the Doctor asked, looking up from the console.

"Getting washed. Honestly, I don't know which was worse -- the maze, the gin, or the slime." She wrinkled her nose. "But you and Zaphod were marvellous, Doctor."

He smiled. "We always are."



"Understanding Avon"

(By Mary Robertson)

Avon's being secretive again... Vila could tell he was trying to hide something from the way the other man's eyes constantly swept the room, as if he expected huge, hairy aliens to pop out of every shadow, and the way he yanked Orac's key whenever the thief came within a hundred yards of the flight deck. It's enough to give a man a complex...

His fellow crew members weren't much help. When questioned about Avon's increasingly odd behaviour, Cally just muttered something about vitamin supplements. Blake dismissed the whole problem with an offhand, "That's Avon for you. Try to understand."

Vila did not understand. He didn't like it when there was something he didn't understand, and he liked it even less when the something he didn't understand was Avon. Not understanding Avon could prove hazardous to a person's health. So, in the interests of his good health and continued existence, he made up his mind to discover Avon's secret.

Haunting the touchy tech's footsteps succeeded only in providing him with a handy target for his verbal missiles; surveillance of the corridor outside his cabin netted a few quizzical glances from other members of LIBERATOR's crew, but nothing else.

By the time LIBERATOR settled into orbit around Fairhope III, Vila had, in fact, learned nothing except his own limitations. All that extra work was exhausting, and it left him no closer to understanding their resident genius than he had been aboard the prison ship LONDON.

It was, therefore, with more than a little trepidation that he heard Avon request his presence on a planned planetary shopping expedition.

"Why me?" he wailed, knowing full well that if Avon wanted his presence, Avon would have his presence, no matter what he had to say on the subject. "Why not Jenna, or Cally, or..."

"Because you are a thief."

Vila decided he didn't care for the speculative gleam in Avon's eye. "I thought you were going to buy parts," he protested, staring pointedly at a pile of gems near the man's elbow. "What do you need a thief for?"

The quiet, deadly calm voice spoke eloquently of growing impatience. "LIBERATOR requires special components not readily available on the open market. We cannot buy them. Since our feather-headed leader insists upon seeking out every Federation scout ship in the galaxy, we need those components in order to keep the ship from disintegrating around our ears."

"I thought the auto-repair circuits did that."

"Auto-repair is one of the systems that requires attention." He aimed a sour look at Blake. "The

circuits have been damaged through over-use. Now, get your tools, and come with me."

"Blake, do I have...?" Vila began querulously.

"I'll come, too."

"No!" Avon snapped. "The only assistance I require is Vila's. I need stealth, not speeches."

The rebel leader sputtered, but even through his discomfiture, he could recognize the truth. His skills lay in language and persuasion; with the possible exception of Gan, the others were far better equipped to deal with this sort of mission. His protests died swiftly.

Vila watched the exchange in disgust. "Always need my help," he muttered, hurrying away to gather a few odds and ends; his whole kit was too unwieldy for a shopping expedition. "Can't do anything on their own. No wonder they got caught!"

Of course, there were a few advantages to the situation, he reminded himself as he rejoined the others at the teleport. He did want to know what the man was up to, and Avon could not now claim the thief's presence unwanted. It was just that he hadn't planned on placing himself in danger to find out.

Avon was still talking when he returned. "...buying most of what we need, and the one item we must steal is small. We should have no trouble. Too large a party would attract unwanted attention. The fact is, Vila could easily manage on his own if he knew what to look for."

The thief couldn't decide if he had just been complimented or insulted -- insulted, probably, considering the speaker. "I'm ready." He could see "about time" written all over the computer tech's face, but Avon handed him his bracelet without comment, and nodded toward the teleport.

"Put us down, Blake."

* * * * *

It was afternoon on Fairhope III. Vila huddled into the jacket he wore against the chill, damp air, and wrinkled his nose. The planet smelled like a chemical experiment gone wrong. The natives might be used to it, but he certainly wasn't.

Dejectedly, he followed Avon as he prowled through yet another seedy shop, and talked to yet another seedy shopkeeper. Most of these people would be hard pressed to make themselves presentable enough for the Delta Domes. What's he trying to prove, anyway?

Accepting another parcel, Vila sighed. Blake or Gan would really have been more suitable as a beast of burden. He could understand why he might be preferable to Blake, who would argue and question every purchase, but why not Gan?

"Done."

"Huh? Oh, Avon?"

"Wake up, you idiot! We still have work to do."

"I thought you said we were done."

"We are done -- here." Taking back a few bundles, Avon led the way to a relatively secluded spot in a nearby alley, and called the ship.

But day was fast turning to dark before Cally teleported down to accept their purchases.

"Where have you been?" Avon demanded before she even had a chance to solidify. "We have been waiting at least an hour -- in the rain." He dripped meaningfully.

"Sorry. That squall blanked out the communications and teleport to this area. Some chemical property in the atmosphere, I'm afraid. It's over now." She struggled to suppress a smile at the sight of the two half-drowned, not-very-likely-looking criminals. "Did you get everything? Are you ready to come up yet?"

Avon seemed about to refuse, but a glance at Vila changed his mind. "Most of the items are there," he answered, pointing, "but we have yet to retrieve the most important component. I was not planning on a return to the ship. However, perhaps we should change our clothing."

"Perhaps you should," she agreed, retrieving their bundles from the trash container where they had been stashed to keep them dry. "Wet clothing might hinder your success. Leather squeaks, you know."

"So do lock-picks, when not properly dry and well-oiled. LIBERATOR!"

"Avon!" That was an indignant Vila.

"LIBERATOR. Gan here."

"Bring us up."

* * * * *

It was a dark and stormy night. Avon and Vila stood secreted in a clump of overgrown weeds beside a tall wrought iron fence.

As usual, Vila was complaining. "I know there's something poisonous in here. I just know it." He squirmed, scratching at an imaginary rash.

"Shut up, Vila." The tone was mild, but the thief immediately quieted. "Were you paying attention when I explained my plan to Cally?"

He nodded. He always listened when Avon spoke to Cally. Avon liked their resident alien, and almost always explained things to her. Since that was the only explanation likely to be forthcoming, listening was simply a matter of self-preservation. Vila believed in self-preservation.

"Very well, then. This should not be difficult for a thief of your admitted skill. What I did not tell Cally is that our last 'purchase' is located in this town's brothel. A somewhat... unusual place to find such an item, but it seems the Madame controls the local black market. Her merchandise is housed in a sub-basement of the establishment. I need your assistance to reach the storage area."

"Why not just approach her as a legitimate customer?" the thief wanted to know, still an unwilling

accomplice, although his interest was piqued. "Is she a Federation agent, do you think?"

"No, but she wants an outrageous price, even by black market standards. She is not a rebel sympathizer, either, so Blake's proselytizing would be of no value."

"What about teleporting directly into the storage area?"

"With an unreliable teleport? With the atmosphere affecting the system even minutely, we could materialize in solid rock, particularly since we do not have the exact coordinates for the sub-basement system. No, this way is best. What's the matter, Vila? Afraid you've lost your touch?" His lips curled in a derision calculated to make the thief forget caution.

It worked. This time, Vila was sure he'd been insulted. "Humph! Lost my touch, have I? I'll have you know I'm the best thief that..."

"So you keep telling me," his companion interrupted. "I'd prefer a practical demonstration." Grabbing his arm, he dragged the still-muttering Vila to an old-fashioned fence.

It was tall, twice as high as their heads. Upon close examination, Vila found it was woven into all manner of intriguing and rather indelicate designs.

"No! Don't touch it!" Avon hissed as he reached out to a particularly fascinating pattern. At the thief's frown, he clarified, "Stun field. Keep your mind on the locks, not the ladies."

Vila dropped his outstretched hand and jumped back from the barrier as if stung. He glared reproachfully at the other man, then began searching for the control box.

When they reached the house, they found a maze of stun fields and electronic locks, and even a few of the antiquated key-opening types. It was a master thief's dream, dozens of intricate and challenging locks, with not a single guard in sight, although Avon kept constant watch while he worked.

"What is it we're trying to steal?" Vila whispered as he tackled yet another of the seemingly endless supply of barriers. The place was cut by corridors and stairways going in every direction, and he hoped Avon could find the way out when the time came. He does seem to know where he's going, probably thanks to Orac, or one of his seedy contacts. If there's another answer, I doubt I'll ever hear it... He sighed.

"We're almost there, Vila. You will recognize the object when you see it."

"But, is it big, or little, or...? There, that's got it!" He grinned at the waiting tech and stood up, dusting off his pants.

"Shh! I hear something!" Avon breathed in answer, angling his gun a little higher. "Go on." He gestured at the darkness beyond the open door. "I'll be right behind you." Plastering himself against the wall, he waved Vila toward the open doorway, while he inched away to investigate.

A feeble light flickered against the black unknown beyond the door. The thief had just crossed the threshold when lights flashed on all over the room. In his haste to escape, he almost backed into an incoming Avon, but firm hands on his back forced him forward again.

Only then did he notice the room contained, not soldiers or security, but a full dozen gorgeous

women, all scantily clad in red fur and ribbons. They posed artistically behind a long table decorated with candles and a red "HAPPY BIRTHDAY, VILA" in fancy letters.

His mouth dropped open, and his eyes widened in shock. "Avon?" he squeaked.

The computer tech met his gaze with one of studied neutrality, although his eyes crinkled a bit at the corners. "Go on," he urged, pushing the thief farther into the room. "I thought this might keep you occupied while I purchase our last required part. The Madame is expecting me."

"B-but, the locks...?"

Avon allowed himself a look of tolerant amusement. "The requisite number of candles would have created a fire hazard," he said dryly. "Surely the significance of the locks will not escape even your less-than-agile brain. Count them." He waited almost patiently until light dawned. "What is more appropriate for a lock-pick than locks to pick?" he continued when Vila looked up. "Then, of course, we have the wine" -- a gesture at the laden table -- "and the women. You will have to ask them about song. Now, go unwrap your presents."

The thief shook his head in disbelief. "I must be dreaming..."

"No. Good thieves are hard to find. It pays to keep them happy. Enjoy this while you can. I will not be long. And if you ever tell anyone about this, I will emphatically deny all knowledge, and will undoubtedly toss you out the nearest airlock. Happy birthday." He quietly backed out of the room as the fur-clad beauties surrounded an astonished Vila and proceeded to serenade him with an ancient Earth tune appropriate to the occasion.

* * * * *

Avon returned several hours later, with a stately, dignified woman on his arm. She was as beautiful as any of the girls in the room, despite her advanced age.

Vila lay draped across a lounge, a nearly empty bottle clutched in one hand, a dishevelled woman in the other. "C'mon in, Avon. This is Rose, 'n Lily, 'n Violet, 'n Hyacinth, 'n..." The words slurred together happily as he tried to introduce his harem. "They're all named after Old Earth flowers," he explained as Avon looked on askance. "Wanna drink?" He proffered his bottle.

The other man shook his head indulgently. "No, Vila. I have concluded my business. Say goodbye now; it's time to return to the ship. Cally will be worried about you."

"Cally? I wonder how she'd look in red fur?" He eyed a discarded piece of outfit longingly.

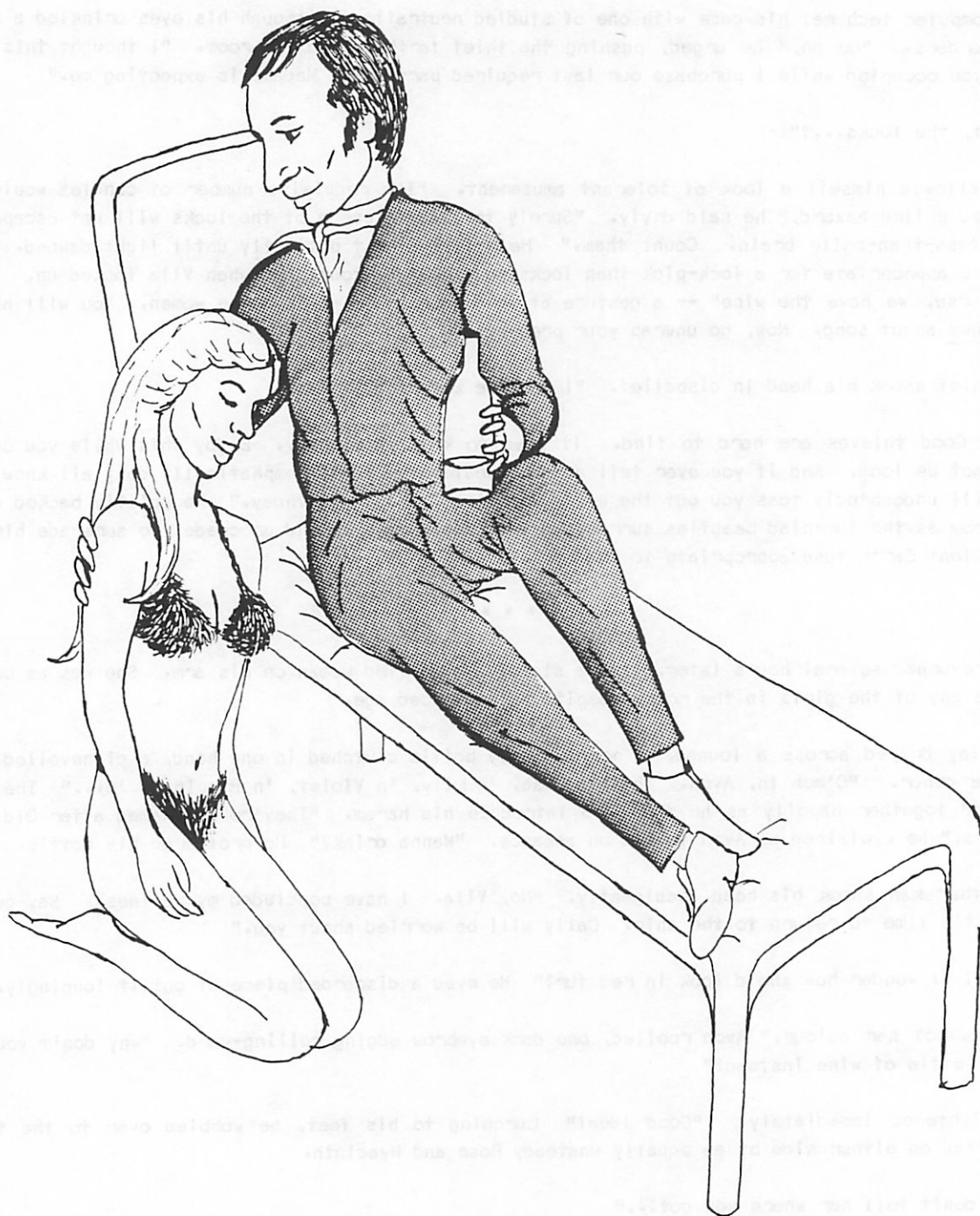
"Red is not her colour," Avon replied, one dark eyebrow edging ceiling-ward. "Why don't you take her a bottle of wine instead?"

He brightened immediately. "Good idea!" Lurching to his feet, he wobbled over to the table, supported on either side by an equally unsteady Rose and Hyacinth.

"Just don't tell her where you got..."

Avon never finished his warning. The door crashed in behind him.

"This is a raid!" Eight of Fairhope's finest burst into the room, amidst a chorus of screams.



Avon shot a murderous glare at the lady beside him, who just shrugged and whispered, "I forgot to turn the perimeter security back on." They both dove for the door.

Realizing this had nothing whatsoever to do with Blake or the LIBERATOR, Avon restrained himself from shooting everyone in sight. However, Vila's logic circuits, which operated only sluggishly at the best of times, were completely pickled. Pulling his gun, the thief managed to injure two of the local constabulary before the computer tech could tackle him and confiscate the weapon in the interest of self-preservation.

He dragged the thief toward a heavy drape, behind which he had seen his female companion disappear. There, he found a door and a set of narrow stairs. Quickly, he heaved a staggering and totally bewildered Vila up.

Reaching the top seemed to take forever, but at last they arrived. Avon motioned his companion to silence while he listened carefully for signs of pursuit, and more importantly, to see if there was anyone on the other side of the door. Hearing nothing untoward, he cautiously tried the knob. It turned easily under his hand.

They were outside. The darkness beyond the door was daunting, as were the bushes, which could afford cover to pursuers as well as pursued. Still, it was better than sitting in a stairwell with an inebriated thief, who was starting to warble off-key ballads about life in the Delta Domes despite Avon's best efforts to keep him quiet.

Cautioning Vila once again to silence, he crept through the door -- and right into the waiting arms of two burly police officers.

"I thought they might come this way," the larger man, a redhead, rumbled as he set about the efficient removal of guns, teleport bracelets, and the contents of their respective pockets. "So many try to escape. We even deliberately let a few go, but your friend here shot Malon, and we just can't let him get away with that, now, can we?" He cuffed them to a nearby tree.

Avon's struggles and snarls earned him a clout across the face. "Behave yourself. We'll be back as soon as we get the girls rounded up." He smiled as thunder rumbled in the distance. "We'd leave you in the patrol car, out of the weather, but after all, you might try and steal it." Laughing at his own joke, Red made his way back through the bushes.

Vila had fallen into a light doze and was softly snoring at the foot of the tree. Avon nudged him with one foot. "Wake up, you fool!" he hissed.

"Huh? Wha...?"

"Hurry and get us out of these, before he comes back."

"He...?" Clearly befuddled, the thief did his best to comply. Normally, such a simple device would merit only a few seconds of attention, but in his present inebriated condition and without any tools, he needed a good ten minutes to get them both free.

Avon was ready to explode, and half-yanked the other man to his feet. They skittered through the raindrops to the still-waiting patrol car, where the computer tech ignored all the niceties of theft. He broke a window, tossed Vila onto the back seat, and hot-wired the vehicle in record time. When it roared to life, he gunned the engine and zoomed off into the night, his companion

hanging on for dear life.

Half an hour and two road-blocks later, Avon considered their situation from a clump of brush beyond the town. It was none too good. They were miles from the coordinates he had given Cally, without either teleport bracelets or the computer part they had ostensibly come to steal. Nor did they have weapons. Vila was drunk -- his own fault, of course, but who could have foreseen the complication of the local constabulary? All they possessed were the clothes on their backs and a local ground car, hardly adequate to their needs.

Under different circumstances, he might have gone quietly with the police, spent the night in their jail, and been released in the morning, none the worse for wear. Vila's shooting spree eliminated that possibility. Gun-play usually caused the locals to search criminal records, and the identities of Kerr Avon and Vila Restal were not exactly unknown, even in this part of the galaxy. Frustrated, he glared at his oblivious companion, who was gleefully mumbling something about red fur locks.

"Vila! Vila, pay attention!"

"Wha...? Oh, Avon, thanks for my present. Best party I ever had." He paused in sudden drunken self-pity. "Only party I ever had." A tear rolled down his cheek, and he sniffled. "Nobody ever gave me a party, only my friend Avon..."

Avon rolled his eyes, beginning to regret his rash desire to make the thief happy. "Vila, we have a problem. Our teleport bracelets are gone, and under the circumstances, I do not think sneaking into police headquarters would be wise." He eyed the thief appraisingly.

"Why not call Blake...?"

"Vila, I just said our brace..."

"Call Blake on the radio." He pointed to the police scanning equipment and smiled vacuously, giggling. "Paging Roj Blake, rebel leader and all-around good guy..."

"All-around bleeding heart, you mean. That is the most..." Avon began, staring out at the rain in despair. Then he suddenly realized just how intelligent the idea was. "...most sensible thing you've said all night!"

Wriggling under the control panel, he set about cannibalizing the primitive radio, no easy task in the dark. Vila, faced with the unlovely sight of Avon's boots where his head should be, decided it might be a good time to find a handy tree, and managed the feat without incident, a bit damp from the rain, but not much the worse for wear. He got lost only once. Then, to amuse himself and keep out of the snarling tech's way, he picked the lock on the vehicle's storage compartment.

"Hey, Avon! Look what I found!"

A head appeared beside the dangling wires Avon was sorting. "I am not interested in..."

"Look!" Clutched tightly to his bosom were two bottles that looked suspiciously like those they had abandoned back at the brothel. "Bet they were trying to abs...abs...steal the evidence."

"Undoubtedly. At least it shows the people on this misbegotten planet have some taste. Now, leave me alone. I am almost finished."

"First, have a birthday drink with me."

"Vila..."

"Just one?"

He considered. It was chilly, and he did owe the thief a little gratitude. The radio was his idea, after all, even if it was an inadvertent one. "Very well, Vila. One drink."

The little man brightened like a sudden flash of sunlight. Avon didn't drink with just anyone. He hardly drank at all, as far as anyone aboard LIBERATOR knew. "A toast." Vila tried to be serious, and failed utterly. "To my friend Avon, who throws wonderful parties."

"I may just throw a certain thief off the ship if he ever tells anyone else about that party."

The words were serious, but the tone was not. Raising the bottle to his lips, Avon drank just enough to keep his friend happy. "Five minutes," he said as he handed the container back and crawled under the console again. "Five minutes, and I should have a working transmitter. After that, it's just a matter of time."

"Time for what?" Vila peered quizzically over the front seat at Avon's boots.

"For the rain to stop, you idiot! Now, be quiet, will you?"

Ignoring the confined space, the thief rose to take exception to the other man's peremptory tone -- and whacked his head into the vehicle's metal roof. With a pained yelp, he sank back into his seat, rubbing the injured area.

"What the devil are you doing?"

"Much you care," the thief muttered in aggrieved self-pity. "You wouldn't care if I..."

Avon sighed. "Of course, I care, Vila, but you can be wearing at times. Now, let me see."

"What about the radio?"

"I'm done. There's nothing left to do but wait until LIBERATOR picks up the signal."

"We'll be rescued?"

"Yes, you fool, we'll be rescued, and you'll live. You just bumped your head a bit. Now, where did you put that bottle?"

* * * * *

Blake didn't know what to think. When he arrived some two hours later, he found his two lost crewmen surrounded by a cache of empty bottles, and warbling a particularly bawdy ballad. He knew Avon wasn't a drinking man. Vila, of course, took every opportunity to quench his thirst, but Avon...?

Something dreadful must have happened... The lump on Vila's head and the purpling bruise across



the left side of Avon's face bespoke an encounter with more than the local bartenders, as did the missing teleport bracelets and their generally dishevelled appearance.

But Blake couldn't get any sense out of them at all. The thief kept offering him drinks and mumbling about red fur flowers, while Avon recited a boring monologue on vintage wines. At least Vila was original.

"I don't suppose you'd care to explain last night?" LIBERATOR's commander asked when the pair appeared on the flight deck late the next morning.

Cally had healed Avon's bruise, but he looked none too happy. "Not particularly," he snarled, wincing at the sound of his own voice. He shot a warning glance at Vila.

"Nothing happened, Blake, really," the thief temporized hastily. Avon at his most congenial could be touchy; Avon with a hangover could be downright dangerous. "We got the part, but some of the locals picked last night to take out our supplier. We got caught in the middle, and lost our bracelets in the fight."

"And the red fur?"

"An alcoholic nightmare," Avon snapped. "If you are quite finished with the inquisition, I have work to do. Vila, I require your assistance. Come with me." Wheeling, he stalked off the flight deck, with Vila in hot pursuit.

Shaking his head, Blake turned back to Jenna and Cally. "I will never understand that man."

Cally smiled. "Which one?"

"Avon. Who else? Vila isn't so hard to figure out."

"Are you sure of that?" In her hand, she held a scrap of red fur. "Funny, I've never seen a red rabbit. Are they native to this planet?"

As one, Blake, Jenna, and Cally turned to gaze at the corridor down which Avon and Vila had disappeared. In the distance, they could hear snatches of a particularly bawdy ballad.





"The Price of Promises"

(By Mary Robertson)

I've watched you on the flight deck late at night
When, thinking there is no one left to see,
You yield up to the pressure of your flight,
For just a time set your emotions free.



Each night, you probe your ponderous machines.
Each night, their answer still remains the same,
And all the daring, damning might-have-beens
Come flooding back with mention of his name.

I've watched you on the flight deck day by day,
Refusing to accept your comrades' care.
For, once, you let your trust get in the way,
And now, you would deny that trust is there.

A vow once made is one that you must keep;
Your honour will allow you nothing less.
You promised him. The price of trust is steep;
The price of promises, I can but guess.

I've watched you on the flight deck, stern and still,
At war with things you cannot understand.
He holds you as no other ever will,
A stallion broken to the master's hand.

Determinedly, you occupy your post,
Fatigue and worry written in your pose.
But no one's learned our Captain is a ghost --
No one, that is, except the one who knows.



"Tangled in Holly"

(By Linda Ruth Pfonner)

The oak wasn't the oldest in the forest, but it was no sapling, either. The squirrel who had made it his home for the past two summers had no way of guessing the tree's age, nor would he have understood the number, for his perception of numbers was limited. To him, the aged oak was his universe -- home and larder, hunting ground and refuge. The hollow branch on the southeast side provided a cozy nest. The tree's buds and new twigs fed him in spring and summer; its acorns fed him in fall and winter. The myriad branches were a playground, and a field where the squirrel dared his luck against hawks and owls, cats and weasels.

On this particular late-summer afternoon, however, it was too hot for even the usually irrepressible titmice, who huddled in the shade of the old oak. The squirrel sprawled along a branch, legs dangling, chin on the bark, panting in the heat. But he kept some of his attention on the suspicious form below him.

The first major fork of the oak sent a huge limb almost perpendicularly away from the trunk, about three yards above the mossy ground. On it lay the supine figure of a young man.

Dressed in soft leathers and coarse homespun in dark forest colours, the lean body lay on its back, one knee flexed, long dark hair in disarray, right arm hanging limply off the edge of the limb. The man's eyes, framed by long, dark lashes, were closed. His left hand lay across his flat stomach, and if he was breathing, the squirrel couldn't see it.

The little rodent knew the man well; he was a familiar inhabitant of the forest. But the animal kept a watchful eye on the longbow lying on the branch beside the still human figure, and on the quiver of hunting arrows beside it. The bow and arrows constituted a threat. It might not matter that the man didn't move, or even seem to be alive.

"Herrrrrrrrrrnnnnne...!"

The young man's eyes snapped open, although he didn't move. The mating cry of the fallow deer, months out of season -- the rut wasn't until November, and it was only July -- was an alarm, a warning -- and a cry for help.

"Herrrrrrrrrrnnnnne...!"

He who had once been Robin of Loxley got to his feet in one smooth, flowing motion. Who would dare use Herne's Call but one of His sons?

Robin strained his hearing to the utmost, but the Call didn't come again. He leaned against the upright trunk, and tried to remember the voice. Who was it...?

The voice wasn't familiar -- but who could it be, other than one of his own men?



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woods
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It wasn't Will Scarlet -- Will wouldn't call unless he was at Death's very door, and perhaps not even then. And it hadn't sounded like Little John. Nasir still held to his own faith; while he might call for help if he were in dire need, he wasn't likely to use the Call of the Stag.

It definitely was not Much. Robin knew a great relief at that realization, then a flicker of guilt. He was the Black Man, the Son of the Woods. He should show no favoritism. But he was human, too, and Much's quick smile and puppy-like eagerness to please endeared him to the entire band. Besides, he was Robin's foster-brother...

The voice had unquestionably been male, so it wasn't Marion's. That was reassuring. It wasn't impossible for his dear Lady to get herself into serious trouble, but not this time...

He made no conscious decision. He simply dropped down out of the tree, landing lightly on the moss-covered ground. He set off at a steady, ground-eating, wolf-like trot.

He went nearly a full league, and found no trace of anything suspicious. The wildlife seemed somewhat unsettled, and he saw no deer, but that was to be expected; the Cry of the Stag disturbed every living thing in the forest, but especially the deer.

[illegible]

Robin straightened, facing the source of the sound, straining to identify the voice. It was male, and very close, perhaps just over the next rise...

He pushed back his hood and clambered nimbly up the slanted trunk of a fallen elder, hoping to overlook the sight before he went in. A flash of blue drew his eyes, and he turned slightly, frowning with concentration as he tried to identify it.

Something struck him brutally hard in the right thigh. His leg buckled, and he grabbed wildly for support. Twigs and leaves slipped through his fingers, and he fell.

He landed heavily on his right shoulder and rolled down a short slope, coming to a halt sprawled at the bottom of a little gully. He lay very still, trying to catch his breath, while a flame of agony grew in his leg. His hand, fumbling for the source of the pain, came upon a hard wooden shaft. One glance at his leg confirmed it -- a crossbow quarrel was buried more than half its length in his thigh.

Robin's head sagged back exhaustedly, and he closed his eyes. His entire body felt drained of strength; the act of regaining his feet was utterly beyond comprehension.

"I got 'im, m'lord I did! A youth dressed in leathers! Knocked 'im right off the branch!"

Robin froze. There was a thrashing in the undergrowth nearby -- the man who had spoken, and several of his companions, no doubt, and they were coming closer. They had to be the Sheriff's men. Who else would be out here, using crossbows, hunting men...?

"Where did he fall?" a new voice demanded imperiously. "I saw nothing. If you're lying to me..."

"Damn you, Gisburne..." Robin whispered the curse under his breath. The voice was unmistakably that of Sir Guy of Gisburne -- and Robin couldn't imagine anyone he wanted in the vicinity less than Sir Guy of Gisburne.

"I'm not lying, m'lord! He should've fallen right under there..."

Struck by sudden panic, Robin dragged himself to a sitting position, and desperately looked around for his bow. It lay where he had first struck the ground -- and it was smashed beyond repair. He must have landed on it. That left him with no weapon but his dagger.

Unable to fight, his only recourse was flight; he had to hide some place where the men-at-arms couldn't find him. The odds, he knew, were against Gisburne deigning to get off his horse, but, by the same token, the knight seldom travelled with fewer than a dozen men-at-arms.

His leg wouldn't support his weight. He knew it, and made no attempt to stand. Instead, he crawled, laboriously, dragging himself with his arms, pushing with his uninjured leg. He wormed his way deeper into the undergrowth, hoping he wasn't leaving too much of a trail. The shaft of the bolt kept snagging on the shrubbery, jarring the point deeper into his leg.

His vision blurred by tears of pain, Robin collapsed in a tiny hollow under a deadfall, sure he couldn't be seen by anyone who didn't take the exact route he'd used. He was unaware that the tree thus sheltering him was another elder -- that most unlucky of trees.

* * * * *

"He must have heard the Call, Will. And he could no more ignore it than we can," Little John said patiently. Will Scarlet was a perverse man, who nearly always played the rôle of Devil's Advocate in anything the band did. John was more accustomed to listening while others argued with Will -- but Nasir seldom spoke, and the three of them were alone. Even now, Nasir stood apart, listening for the Call to come again.

"And what if it's a trap?" Will grumbled. "The Old Ways aren't all that secret -- and they didn't always need to be! Gisburne or someone else could have discovered the Call..."

"Will, Robin got there first. He must have; he was a lot closer than we are. If it's a trap, he may be in trouble. We've got to go and see. We can't just leave him alone out there."

Will didn't have an instant response. He glanced at Nasir, who returned his gaze impassively. "Do you have an opinion?" he inquired sourly.

There was a long silence while the Saracen studied the Saxon's expression. Finally, he nodded. "Yes."

Will waited, but Nasir turned away to study the forest again.

"Would you be so kind as to share your opinion with us, O mysterious one?" he growled sarcastically.

Slowly, Nasir turned to face him. "It is my belief," he began, choosing his words with extreme care, "that Robin knows, by now, the source of the Call. Whether he has profitted by this knowledge, I cannot know. But we are sworn. We cannot abandon him until we know his fate." His command of the language was excellent, but he spoke cautiously, as if uncertain of it. He preferred not to sound like an uneducated peasant -- even if the men to whom he spoke were uneducated peasants.

Will sighed. Nasir was a foreigner who still followed his own odd faith, worshipping a God called

Allah through a divinely appointed spokesman, Mohammed. It sounded too much like the Church to Will, although the Saracen said it was different. And he also never mentioned any female, which was even more baffling. How could any God exist without a Goddess? Even the Christians knew that -- they had the Virgin and the Magdalen. Herne had the Great Mother, Who was Mother to all that lived and breathed and grew -- including the Horned One Himself.

But that wasn't important, not now.

The important thing was that Nasir was right. Robin was their Man in Black, the Son of Herne in Sherwood. They were sworn to him. They had to answer the Call of the Stag, and they had to discover if Herne's Son really was in trouble.

"You're right," he conceded, sighing again. "And there must be some reason why all three of us think Robin's in trouble."

"C'mon, then!" The matter decided, Little John was instantly impatient for them to be on their way. He didn't wait for any response, but turned and set off at once.

Smiling ruefully, Will followed. Nasir fell in behind -- willing enough, and eager enough, but not smiling. There was nothing to smile about.

* * * * *

Robin huddled in his tiny refuge. He was cold, and sweating, and his right legging was soaked with blood. Nothing he did seemed to slow the blood flowing from the wound. He lay on the rotted leaves, panting, his eyes closed, and listened to the men-at-arms stumbling around in the undergrowth nearby. There was nothing else he could do. He hated acting the part of the wounded doe to Gisburne's wolf pack, but he had no alternative. He had no weapon but a dagger, and his strength was flowing out of him in a thick, red stream, soaking the earth beneath him.

He told himself he didn't mind dying, so long as he did it in the forest. Please, Herne, he prayed silently, just keep Gisburne from finding me alive. The sword -- Albion! -- and the silver arrow are safely hidden. Just keep Gisburne away from me while I'm still breathing... He felt his mind fogging, and let himself relax. It won't be long, now...

* * * * *

Sir Guy of Gisburne tightened his grip on the reins, and his sorrel gelding tensed, striving for a secure footing in the slippery mud, but too constricted by his rider's tight hold on his head to be at all certain of his balance. Inevitably, the horse lost his footing, and slid on his haunches down a small embankment.

Angry, Gisburne jerked the poor, confused beast's head up. Obediently, the sorrel got all four legs under him and made a valiant effort to regain the path. He made it, but not without effectively destroying that portion of the track.

"No one's found the wolf's-head yet?" Gisburne demanded of his men. "If he's wounded, he can't have gone far..."

"Herne protects His own," someone muttered -- just loudly enough for the annoyed young Norman to hear.

"No horned devil can keep anything from honest Christians!" he snapped. He yanked the gelding around roughly. "He's got to be here, and we're not going back without him. Now, find him!"

Dickon, the sergeant of the squad, sighed heavily. Young Willy had, indeed, knocked someone out of the elder -- and Dickon was very much afraid he knew who it was. He couldn't admit to the Norman lord that he himself was a follower of the Hornéd Hunter; Gisburne would have him flayed as a traitor. But how could he betray Herne's Son to the Norman?

Dickon wrung his hands in despair. Willy was a good shot with a crossbow; chances were very good that the Hooded Man was dead. But what if he's not? If he's alive, he's surely badly hurt... Which is worse -- dying alone in Sherwood, or falling, wounded, into Norman hands...?

The decision was taken from him. The men-at-arms had quickly limited the quarry's possible hiding places. An elder had fallen in some long-ago storm, and now lay half-buried in a tangle of holly. Dead or alive, the man Willy had shot was hiding underneath that deadfall. There was no other place for him to be, and if he was there, he had to have been alive -- at least for a time -- just to have crawled into hiding.

The men-at-arms ripped at the undergrowth, trying to uncover their quarry, anxious as young hounds at their first fox earth. All they accomplished was the destruction of the stand of holly and the tearing up of their hands.

"Hold!" Dickon called sharply. The men froze. "You men stand around the edges," he directed them firmly. "I'll go in. If he flushes, he's yours."

The men formed a ragged circle around the thicket. Dickon took a deep breath and dropped to his hands and knees in the soft earth. It took a few moments, but he soon found the opening he knew had to be there, and he crawled into the deadfall.

Very little light filtered through the tangle of weeds and vines and evergreen holly, but there was a smear of blood on a leaf where he put his hand. Dickon knew he had found the track.

A dim shape was barely visible ahead of him, and he squinted, trying to focus on it in the shadows. It didn't look like a human figure at all; it looked more like a wolf sprawled out on the leafy mold. Eyes glowed green in the shadows, and he saw a flash of teeth, and heard a wolfish snarl.

But as his eyes adjusted to the dimness, the shape resolved itself into the form of a dark-haired young man dressed in leathers, with a hood up over his head, and a dagger in his hand. The youth's eyes were shadowed, but the snarl was very real.

Dickon caught his breath in dismay. "The Hooded Man!" he whispered, recognizing Robin from the ceremonies he had attended deep in Sherwood. He swallowed hard. Should I kill him here and now, or bring him out to be Gisburne's prisoner? Which is worse...?

Could he kill Robin if th' Hood?

Robin heard the soldier coming, and retreated as far as he could. Wounded he was, and weakened near death, but he was Herne's Son, and he would not tamely submit to being slaughtered by the Normans.

Dickon noticed the odd way the Hooded Man was lying, and realized he was, after all, badly hurt.

The younger man's leggings were soaked with blood, and those fierce eyes were glazed with pain and weakness. The sergeant leaned toward him, to steady him, and jerked back abruptly as Robin slashed at him with his dagger.

"Take it easy, lad," Dickon said quietly. "I just want to see your leg..." He moved closer, talking softly, as he would to a wounded dog or hawk. The young man's defensive determination faded as he moved closer. He twisted the dagger out of Robin's hand, and tucked it into his own belt.

Robin couldn't focus his eyes, and he found it difficult to think. The soldier's voice was soothing, and he had to fight desperately to stay awake. He knew he was surrounded by foes, and if he relaxed, he would surely be killed.

"Be easy, lad. Herne takes care of His own."

Robin blinked, startled. He must be dreaming! His father had been dead for a very long time...

But then, if he was dying, perhaps Ailric of Loxley had indeed returned to accompany his son across the Abyss. Such things weren't unheard of...

He tried to sit up, to get a better look at the man bending over him, and jarred the crossbow quarrel in his leg. This time, the pain swept up into his head, and exploded behind his eyes. The blinding light faded into darkness, and the world darkened with it.

Dickon caught him as he collapsed, and cradled the slim body against his own for a moment.

"Well? Well? Have you found him yet?" Gisburne's petulance sounded even more childish when compared to the dark youth's savage courage.

But the sergeant was as trapped as young Robin, and knew it. "Here, m'lord," he called, unable to hide the regret in his voice. "I have him. Willy, give me a hand with the lad -- he's passed out."

The youth in leather was a dead weight in their arms, and it took both Willy and Mark, a second man-at-arms, to drag him clear of the thicket. They laid him on a flat piece of ground nearby while Dickon climbed out. Gisburne dismounted and went to stand over the motionless body.

"So, wolf's-head, you thought your silly forest god would protect you..." He kicked the outlaw's body, and nearly lost his balance as his other foot slipped in the mud. He had to grab at a tree trunk for support, and several of his men-at-arms turned away to hide their grins.

"M'lord, we need to do something about that bolt in his leg, or he won't live to be taken back," Dickon spoke up quickly. "You said you wanted him alive, to be shown to the Sheriff..."

For a moment, Gisburne wavered, torn between gloating over his victory and anticipating the triumph of presenting a living prisoner to the Sheriff before an admiring crowd in Nottingham. "Very well," he said finally. "Do what you can for him. And build a litter to carry him back." He swung back into his saddle and guided the muddy gelding back toward drier ground.

"Aye, m'lord..."

* * * * *

It was some time later when Little John, Will Scarlet, and Nasir found the site of the ambush.

"I smell blood," John announced, stopping in his tracks.

Will and Nasir stopped, too. It didn't take long for them to find the trail Robin had left as he crawled for cover. The message on the ground was plain to their experienced eyes. Little John tore the deadfall to pieces in a burst of frustrated rage, just to be certain Robin wasn't still lying within it. Then he stood amidst the wreckage, panting.

"He was hurt, but they bound up his wound," Will said slowly. "See, here's a patch of moss they raided for bandaging."

Nasir joined them, holding Robin's smashed bow. He didn't speak, but merely handed it to John.

The big man accepted it silently, a terrible expression on his face. He had made that bow for Robin, and of the entire band, only Little John and Robin himself had been able to string it. It had been John's Mid-Summer gift to his leader and friend.

Will swallowed hard, and had to turn away from the naked grief on John's face. "They carried him away on a litter," he said quietly.

John shuddered, and his grip on the smashed bow tightened. "He's bad, then," he stated, his tone flat.

"Aye, likely he is," Will had to admit, although the thought of Robin, wounded and alone, in Norman hands, chilled his very soul. "If he wasn't, they'd never have caught him. You know that."

John climbed out of the deadfall and collapsed on the ground beside it. "Who caught him? The Sheriff's away, and the Abbot only hunts swans."

"Guy of Gisburne."

John glared at Nasir. "That young Norman ass couldn't find his balls with a torch to light the way!" he growled.

In response, the Saracen held out his hand. Vivid against the black leather glove was a twist of mud-stained hair torn from a horse's tail. It was pale gold in colour.

"Gisburne bought a new horse at the July fair," Will said with a nod. "A big, flashy blond sorrel with no more sense than an addled hen."

John took the twist of hair and studied it for a long moment. Then his shoulders slumped. "It must be..."

Will swallowed hard. He hadn't seen Little John so heartsick since the battle at Simon de Belleme's castle, where so many friends, old and new, had died. He found it rather unnerved him to see the Indomitable John so crushed. "At least we know where to go look for him..." he offered softly, trying to hearten his friend.

For a long moment, John didn't move, and Will glanced worriedly at Nasir. Then the big man stood

up. He didn't speak to either of his companions, but drew himself up to his full height, raised his face to the overcast sky, and screamed.

"Herrrrrrrrrrnnnnne...!"

A league away, a sorrel gelding shied and tried to buck as the Call echoed through the forest. The dozen men-at-arms who followed, taking turns carrying a litter with its dying burden, bunched a little closer together, and a few cast nervous glances at the darkening forest.

* * * * *

Marion of Leaford leaned against a tree trunk, her eyes closed, trying very hard not to betray the terror she felt. Something had happened to Robin; of that, she was certain. She had heard the Call, and felt his pain and fear as if they were her own.

But there was no point in losing her self-control. Whatever had happened was already done. All she and the rest of the band could do was wait. They couldn't plan until they knew what had actually happened, and they couldn't know that until Robin came back.

Much was tending the fire. He came out of the forest with an armload of wood, and dropped it into the pile he had already amassed. He settled down to feed the flames, leaning against the same tree that sheltered Marion. Wrapped in her thoughts, she didn't see the three scouts return.

But Much did. "Little John!" he called, standing up and grinning in delight.

John didn't reply, or even look at his young friend. He walked toward Marion, his shoulders slumped, his face a mask of hard-held grief.

She looked up at him, and her face went deathly pale. She didn't even see Will Scarlet or Nasir standing at the edge of the clearing. Much's grin faded, and the other members of the band fell silent, waiting, dreading the news.

The big man stopped a stride in front of Marion, who stared up into his face. "John?" she whispered, her throat dry as chalk.

He dropped to his knees before her, and couldn't meet her eyes. He had to swallow several times before he could force his voice to function. "Robin..."

Her heart froze in her breast.

"He...he's taken, Marion..."

For a long, long moment, there was no sound in the outlaw camp. Then Friar Tuck sighed noisily and crossed himself.

"Praises be! He lives, then? The Call we heard was not a death knell?"

Everyone relaxed just a little, and Marion started to breathe again.

"No, he lives." Will stepped forward into the clearing. His step was heavy, his eyes hard. "But he's hurt, and Guy of Gisburne had him carried by litter to Nottingham."



"Gisburne?" Marion whispered. "Gisburne has him? How?"

John and Will told her their guesses about what had taken place, and John showed her the remnants of Robin's smashed bow.

"So," Will concluded, "he's hurt, and badly, but he's probably still alive. And the Normans have him."

That horror was enough to silence them all, and it was several minutes before Much savagely threw a chunk of firewood at a tree. The faggot shattered, and they all jumped.

"Much...!" Marion was shocked at his unaccustomed violence.

"I wish we had an army of our own," he growled, carefully not looking at her. "I wish we could sack Nottingham, and be rid of the Sheriff forever!"

"No."

For a moment, they were all startled; Nasir seldom participated in their debates. Then John, frowning, spoke up.

"Why not? If it weren't for the Sheriff, we wouldn't be outlaws."

"Your king would send another, with a bigger army," the Saracen pointed out quietly. "All that would be accomplished would be the destruction of Sherwood, and the needless deaths of many men." He turned his lambent gaze on Much, who quailed. "And do not speak so lightly of sacking a town. It is an ugly business, and no honest man enjoys it."

Properly chastened, Much nodded. As soon as Nasir looked away, he took refuge close beside Marion.

Tuck nodded approvingly. "You are wise, indeed, Nasir. Who would have suspected it?"

The Saracen recognized the raillery in the friar's tone, and so took no offence. He looked over his leather-clad shoulder at Tuck for a moment, then went to the fire and pushed some loose soil over it with his boot, putting out the flames. He pitched away the larger pieces of wood, then finally covered the scorched earth with fresh green sod saved from when they dug the firepit. One good rain, and there would be no sign of their campsite.

"C'mon." Will swung his arm. "Let's go."

The rest of the band fell in behind him.

* * * * *

[At this point, "Tangled In Holly" was left to be concluded, by both the original author and the writer of the best possible alternate ending. We offer both conclusions now: "Tangled In Holly," Part II, by Linda Ruth Pionner, and "Double Helix," by L.A. Carr. Our sincere congratulations to the winner of our contest -- and to the ultimate winners -- those of you who read what follows!]

"Tangled In Holly"

Part II

Dickon and his wife Maude were frightened. As soon as the patrol reached Nottingham, the castle chirurgeon whisked their wounded prisoner away to his own room. Maude had a lifetime's training as a village healer -- and a low opinion of the man's skill. From Dickon's description of Robin's wound, she was worried.

"You know that butcher," she fretted. "He will pray, and bleed him when the wound swells, and pay no attention to his thirst. He'll use no poultices, and if he uses any herbs, he'll likely use them wrongly!"

"There's naught we can do," Dickon pointed out gently. "He's not likely to let a village healing-woman -- especially a Saxon! -- anywhere near Robin."

* * * * *

The huge stag stood before him, one forefoot scraping restlessly at the turf. The magnificent antlered head was held high and proud, and the stag's eyes bored into his own. Robin stood motionless, entranced by the sheer animal beauty of the ten-year-old stag. Held by its unrelenting stare, he shivered, chilled to his very soul. This was more than just an animal, he was sure. He waited, his hands at his sides, his back straight, his head up, and met the stag's impassive attention as calmly as he could, all the while wondering what it meant.

The image shimmered like a summer mirage, then, as Robin held his breath in anticipation, changed into the tall, imposing figure of Herne's avatar, the Man from the Cave. The Man stared at him, his expression unreadable, his eyes hard and cold. He did not speak.

Robin fought his way back to consciousness, expecting to see either the Cave, the wood, or the Summerland and Herne's Own Face. Instead, he blinked his eyes open to find himself lying on a pallet of clean straw; there were stone walls around him, and smoke-stained thatch over his head.

He felt terrible, dizzy and sick, with a pounding headache that warred with the throbbing in his leg, and a terrible thirst surmounting all. He tried to speak, but his desiccated mouth and throat could not form words. When he tried to sit up, everything went black.

* * * * *

When he had given orders for his prisoner's care, Sir Guy of Gisburne went to his own quarters. He hardly noticed the pages and body squires as they scurried around, helping him out of his muddy boots and rusting mail, garbing him in a long, soft woolen robe. Absently, he ordered wine, then went to sit on a window coping from which he could see the road approaching the castle. The Sheriff would return soon -- two days; three at the most -- and everything had to be just so.

He sat there, leaning against the cold stone, uncaring, sipping wine from a silver goblet, hardly tasting the excellent vintage, planning the Sheriff's reception and the presentation of his prisoner. Exact details would, of course, depend on the condition of that prisoner. It occurred to him then that it would be a most salutary spectacle if he had several other members of the



outlaw's band to act as horrified witnesses. And, if by some masterful stroke of luck, I might manage to capture the Lady Marlon...

He shivered with delight. The Sheriff would be stunned speechless. Oh, to be able to present the pair...!

"Rory!" he called.

"Aye, sir!" The page came running, and halted, panting, before him.

"Get Matthew and Cully in here."

"Yes, sir!"

The two sergeants appeared with reasonable dispatch, but by the time they arrived, Gisburne was so preoccupied with his triumphal plans that he had almost forgotten why he'd summoned them.

"You sent for us, sir?"

He blinked, then nodded, recollecting himself. "Yes. No doubt you've heard that I captured the wolf's-head, Robin Hood, this afternoon?"

The two men glanced at one another and nodded warily. "Aye, sir," Matthew answered. "The whole town knows it."

"This leaves his band of outlaws without a leader," the knight went on, oblivious to the stiffness in his listeners. "I want you each to take a company into Sherwood. Find the outlaws, capture as many as you can, and kill the rest. Be as quick as you can about it; I want all the prisoners here when the Sheriff returns."

"Aye, sir." Cully nodded glumly. The orders were plain enough; there was no point in arguing that the outlaws were probably scattered over half of Sherwood by now.

The men turned to leave, but Gisburne stopped them. "One thing more. If the Lady Marlon is among them, she is not to be harmed. By all means, capture her, but do not risk her coming to any harm!"

"Aye, sir," Cully acknowledged.

"That's all. Be about it, then."

"Aye, sir." The two men saluted and left, heading back toward their own quarters.

"I wonder if he knows how foolish we're going to look," Cully complained. "Those outlaws are like ghosts in the woods. We're never even going to see one!"

"That's all right with me. I surely don't fancy meeting their Lady. That one's a she-wolf, by all accounts, and a man could get killed, hampered by these orders not to hurt her."

"The Sheriff and the Abbot have never forgiven her for preferring the forest to the convent," Cully pointed out. "And Sir Guy's never forgiven her for preferring Robin to Christ."

"Fair choice, that! Who'd want to marry Christ? D'you think Gisburne wanted her for himself?"

"Maybe." He shrugged. "But he knew as well as she did that the Sheriff and the Abbot wanted her lands, and they weren't about to let her marry."

"So, now, we get to spend a week or more in the woods, chasing outlaws we'll likely never see," Matthew concluded gloomily.

"It could be worse. This way, at least we don't have to watch the execution."

* * * * *

After Compline, Gisburne sought out the chirurgeon, one Master Giscard. He found the man in the corridor outside his rooms, disputing loudly with a Saxon peasant woman while a guardsman stood by, watching silently.

"You're a butcher!" the woman spat as the young knight approached.

"Goodwife, please..." the chirurgeon protested in tones of weary patience.

"What's going on here?"

Giscard sighed. "This woman insists on treating the prisoner, sir. She claims her village potions will heal him better and faster than anything I can do." His opinion of this was manifest in the tone of his voice.

Gisburne instantly sided with the Norman against the Saxon. "It is good of you to offer, but Master Giscard is professionally trained..."

"In what?" she interrupted, her voice fairly crackling with anger. "In butchery? In priest's work? Bah! He does not even know the uses of comfrey! If you want this man to live until morning, you must let me in!"

"No," Gisburne said flatly. "Master Giscard is in charge. There will be no village superstitions here. Guard, take her out of here!" Assuming the man would obey, he turned toward the chirurgeon, who bowed him into the room.

Dickon stood beside his infuriated wife, but made no attempt to touch her. The flame of her fury was banked slightly when they realized both Normans had forgotten their presence, and had left the door to the sick-room ajar. They kept quiet, and listened.

Gisburne studied the limp figure on the pallet and felt himself grow cold. He and Loxley were of an age; he had a few months on the outlaw, but not many. Yet there the man lay -- strong, magnetic, a leader of men. The outlaw was a man to whom the peasantry of an entire county -- and beyond -- looked for deliverance from a still-hated occupying army -- even though the Normans had been in England for a century and more.

"The wound is deep and inflamed," the chirurgeon chattered, but the knight paid scant attention. All he could see was that, even wounded and near death, Robin of Loxley was still a magnetic, powerful personality. His fists clenched in impotent fury. How could God be so cruel, to make Loxley -- an outlaw and a pagan! -- the man I've always dreamed of being...?

"...If so, then I'll have to amputate..."

He came aware with a start. "Amputate?" he repeated, stupefied.

"If I cannot break his fever, yes, I will have to amputate the leg."

Gisburne swallowed hard. He was, after all, a soldier, and had all a soldier's *horror and fear of surgery* -- and especially of amputation.

"Certainly, it is to be devoutly hoped that such measures will not be necessary, but I am prepared, should the need arise." Giscard nodded meaningfully toward a table beside the bed.

The knight looked, and flinched. On the table lay an assortment of instruments that seemed to belong more to a torture chamber than to a sick-room -- pincers and forceps, probes and scalpels, and even a saw. He shuddered, and turned blindly away.

"My lord?"

"Do what you must," he said thickly. "As long as he lives to be hanged!"

Gisburne plunged out into the corridor, his mind a-roll with the image of a maimed Robin Hood haunting his sleep for the rest of his days. He never noticed the peasant woman and the guardsman standing by the door.

Dickon was shaking with fury. "The damned butcher!" he hissed. "He just likes cutting up living men. If I did it, I'd be a murderer, but just because he claims to be a doctor, he gets away with it."

"Well, he won't, not this time," Maude said firmly.

* * * * *

A rider on a lathered horse, wearing the Sheriff's livery, thundered into Nottingham Castle. He let the grooms take his almost-ruined horse, but kept the saddle-bags; one of them contained a very important message.

"Do ye know where I can find Sir Guy of Gisburne?" he asked the hostler who came to take charge of his mount.

The man shrugged, his attention more than three-quarters claimed by the swaying, gasping horse. The poor beast had been cruelly over-ridden, and needed care; the hostler seldom bothered with anything beyond his own area of specialization.

"Come, now, sirrah!" The messenger was upset. "Surely, someone must know where he is!"

The hostler rubbed the horse's near foreleg, and did not look up. "Aye," he grunted laconically. "There's summat as do. But I'm not of 'em. Have ye thought of yon hall?" He nodded toward the Sheriff's residence wing and the Court.

The messenger was in too much of a hurry to argue with him. He just ran that way, the saddle-bags flung over his shoulder.

"Welcome," the hostler grunted. The horse flicked an ear at him, and he decided the poor, mistreated beast just might recover, after all.

* * * * *

When the outlaw band arrived at Nottingham, the sun was already down. They stopped in a small clearing under a whitethorn that spread its branches welcomingly for them.

Little John used a short, wide-bladed knife to dig a firepit. First, he cut a square of sod, and lifted it out, setting it carefully aside. Then, using the knife and his hands, he dug the hole about a handspan deep. Much brought him kindling, and with a green stick and a twist of old, broken bowstring, the big man started his fire in a chunk of old, dry oak. He fed it slivers of tinder, and swiftly had a merry little blaze going. Will went out to find meat. Tuck sat down beside the fire to peel onions. Much busied himself collecting more firewood.

They all worked together so well that no words or instructions were needed.

Marion stood under the whitethorn, leaning against its trunk, looking out into the forest as if she could see the castle at Nottingham even through the intervening trees. Is Robin alive? Can it be possible we're risking our lives in hopes of rescuing a man already dead? Is what we're doing hopeless and suicidal? If we risk our lives -- and lose them -- to rescue a man already dead, will God construe that to be suicide? What's Herne's opinion on self-destruction?

Theology was not one of the things they often discussed over dinner. Indeed, some members of the band -- most notably Will and Nasir -- seemed to have a positive distaste for it. That very simplicity of belief was the major difference between Christ and Herne, she decided. She could almost hear Robin's quiet voice, and the slight smile audible in it...

The White Christ is an idea from Rome, brought here by missionaries from the Roman Church who try to change us to fit their foreign mold. But Herne is. He is of this place, as we are, and in our hearts; He is born there, and lives there, always. You need no priest to tell you when you do evil; Herne speaks in your heart, and you will know when you do wrong. And Herne will know when you truly repent and learn from the mistake. Giving a penny to a priest, whispering in the dark, eating a bite of bread, and sipping a taste of bad wine have nothing to do with atonement. What have you to atone for? You are good and kind, and you harm no one with what you are, or with what you do...

She hugged herself, chilled, then squared her shoulders and threw her head up. If her own feelings were to be trusted, Robin was only waiting for them to come for him.

Marion turned toward the fire just as Nasir materialized out of the forest. The expression in his eyes was grim.

"What's wrong?" she asked at once, her voice carrying in the evening stillness.

"Guardsmen." The Saracen's voice was low and even. "Twenty men, who will cross our trail within the hour."

Much swallowed hard, and turned trusting eyes to Marion. She took a deep breath. "Then we must split up at once," she said coolly. "John, you and Nasir go at once to Nottingham. Bring Robin out as quickly and quietly as you can. We will go and lure these guardsmen deeper into Sherwood than they have ever dreamed of going."



"But...!" Protest erupted from everyone at once. It was Friar Tuck who out-bellowed the others, and so spoke first.

"That cannot be," he said gently. "Certainly, twenty men on our trail are a threat. But there are upwards of a hundred at Nottingham, and two men, helping a third who is sorely wounded, will never escape."

"Then what do you suggest?" she demanded, keeping her temper only with the greatest effort. "We cannot ignore them!"

The friar shook his jowled head. "That's truth. But I think you all should sneak into Nottingham. Leave Will here, and he and I will lead these guardsmen a merry chase."

"You?" Will stopped himself before he became too insulting. "I am surely the best in woodcraft, saving Robin. But you, Tuck? You can hardly go a mile without wheezing!"

"Speed, we'll not be needing, not in the woods," he pointed out. "But Marion will need Little John's strength and Nasir's two swords, as well as Much's quickness. They may have to flee pursuit. We'll be foxes, leading the hapless hounds into hazard and mud."

There were a few moments of silence, as everyone wrestled with the idea. Finally, Marion nodded. "I find I must agree."

The others nodded, too, Nasir without hesitation, the others more slowly.

Little John scratched his head. "I don't know," he fretted. "Much as I'd like to go to Nottingham, oughtn't I stay in the wood? I don't sneak very well..."

Friar Tuck shook his head vehemently. "No, lad, no. If Robin's hurt badly, Marion will need you to carry him back to us. No other of us could do that."

The big man smiled slowly. "That's the truth."

"Sure," Will grinned wickedly. "Even if you do stand out like a maypole in a meadow, still you're strong as an ox -- and about as smart!"

John cocked a speculative eye at his friend. "At least I don't always look like I'd been sheared by a blind man..."

Will laughed, then turned to the friar. "C'mon, now, we'd best be about it."

Tuck sighed theatrically, and set aside the onions he'd been peeling. "I suppose this means we won't be having stew for supper."

"Munch on the onions while you walk," Will advised. "We need to find those soldiers and set them a merry trail to follow."

"They had just crossed the creek at the three-stone ford," Nasir told him. "They are moving west, and grumbling as they walk."

"Not paying much attention to what they're doing?" Tuck wondered.

The Saracen smiled faintly. "They seem convinced they'll not see us, and only wish they could go home."

Will chortled. "We'll make 'em wish it harder! C'mon, Tuck...!"

Friar Tuck got to his feet with much creaking and groaning. "All right, tyrant," he wheezed, brushing himself off with one hand. In the other, he held two onions. "Dinner?"

"No, thanks. You'll need all your strength." Will turned to Marlon and Little John, and his tone turned serious. "Remember, now, you can't afford to fight. You've got to sneak in, and sneak out..."

"No fighting," John agreed. "Just a bit of throat-slitting, if we must."

"But only if you must," Will warned him. "You'll be bearding the lion in his den, as it is..."

"Go on, now," Marlon smiled. "We'll be careful. Just make sure you are! And Herne protect us all!"

"Herne protect us!"

* * * * *

The castle was at meat; almost everyone was in the main Hall, having dinner. Gisburne had not yet decided whether he liked presiding over meals, but in the Sheriff's absence he was the highest-ranking man present, so it devolved upon him. He lounged in his seat, eating only what appealed to him, and little enough of that. In the morning, he would have a gallows built, and when the Sheriff returned, they would hang the outlaw and mount his head on a pike outside the gates.

The thought ruined what was left of his appetite. He was not much of a knight, but he was enough of a man to know that hanging Robin of Loxley, when he'd been taken by treachery, was the coward's way out of his battle with the outlaw. If the man had been taken in fair combat, it would have been different. Gisburne's father, now dead fifteen years, must be rolling in his grave at these scurrilous actions of his only son. Sir Gerard de Gisburne had always been the soul of honour, and a proponent of knightly conduct, and had striven to impress these values upon his son and heir. But Guy, attached to the service of Robert de Rainault, Sheriff of Nottingham, had seen too many short-cuts to fulfillment to be willing to go back to the straight and narrow way.

"I was never up to your standards, anyway, father," he muttered as he reached for his goblet.

A disturbance at the far end of the room drew his attention. A stranger, dressed in riding leathers and the Sheriff's colours, strode into the Hall. He cast around a bit, as if looking for someone, and Gisburne sat up straighter, knowing he had to be the one sought.

Sure enough, as soon as the newcomer saw the knight, he came toward him, dodging drunken guardsmen and managing to flirt with three different serving wenches without slowing down or deviating from his course. Gisburne hated the man cordially by the time he reached the high table.

"A message, Sir Guy. From the Sheriff..."

* * * * *

As the Hall filled for dinner, Dickon and Maude -- the latter carrying a satchel filled with medicaments -- sneaked back to the surgeon's chambers. Because the patient was an outlaw, there was a guard on duty, but he was one of Dickon's friends, and saw no reason why Maude should not see the prisoner. He let them in without question, and agreed to warn them if anyone approached.

In the chamber, Maude went straight to Robin's side. He was tossing in a delirium of fever, and she knew exactly what to do; she had made her preparations in advance. From her bag, she pulled a stoppered bottle and a small, handleless cup. She poured a measure of camomile tea into the cup, then gently encouraged her patient to drink. Dickon had to help, holding the young man still so the warm tea would not spill.

After Robin had swallowed the tea, Maude tucked a blanket snugly around him, baring only the wounded leg. He ceased his tossing and lay still, breathing lightly and quickly.

The bandaging Master Giscard had used was dirty and blood-stained. Dickon's wife shook her head and fished another bottle out of her bag, then slowly poured the pale green contents over the bandaging, soaking it thoroughly. She waited a minute or two, then slowly unwrapped the cloth. The warm colewort tea had soaked it free of the wound, and it came away easily, without tearing the flesh. She discarded the stained fabric by tossing it into the farthest corner of the room.

"Now what?" Dickon inquired. The quarrel wound was inflamed and ugly; with the dried blood gently washed away by the colewort, it was bleeding again, albeit slowly.

"At least the blood is not black," was all she said. Back to her bag she went, this time coming out with a clean linen cloth and an earthenware pot. Her husband recognized the paste within by its scent; it was her favourite poultice for wounds, made of yarrow and toadflax beaten together.

"He sweats, Maude," he told her, noticing the beads of moisture on Robin's upper lip and forehead.

"Good. This will help even more." She applied the poultice, holding it firm against the wound even though her patient flinched. After a moment, Robin relaxed again, and Dickon thought he slept. But a closer look showed they were being watched by a pair of tired, puzzled dark eyes.

Robin recovered consciousness slowly, reluctantly. At first, all he remembered was pain, unbearable heat, and a distressing confusion. Then, newer sensations filtered in. He realized he was not alone, and opened his eyes, hoping and expecting to see Marion and the other members of his band. Instead, a strange man's face swam a bit, then came into focus.

"Dickon...?" he whispered, startled by the faintness of his voice.

The man bit his lip and looked away. The weak smile and the welcome recognition were savage wounds to his already-flayed conscience.

"Aye, lord," he admitted miserably. "Don't you go twistin' about, now; it'll only hurt."

Robin obeyed, but looked around, still a little dazed, and not quite fully aware. "What? No cell?"

"Gisburne wants to be sure you live to be hanged," the sergeant said bitterly. "And that can't be until the Sheriff comes back..." He let his voice trail off meaningfully.

The expression on Robin's face showed he understood. "How long?"

"We don't know. There hasn't been any word," Maude explained. "He was expected yesterday. He could come any time."

The outlaw didn't react for a long moment. Then he glanced down at his bared leg. The poultice was warm and comforting, but the leg resisted being moved. "How bad is that?" he inquired.

The woman put her hands on her ample hips and glared at him. "Much as I hate to leave you in the care of that butcher of a chirurgion, I don't think you can walk yet, lord."

"But I have to, don't I? I don't propose to wait around for the Sheriff's pleasure."

"You won't do yourself any good if you stand up, only to fall over!" she said sharply. "At least, wait until the poultice is done, and I've put a clean bandage on."

He lay back with a tired smile. "Very well, Maude. I'll do as you say."

"You're altogether too bright for a lad your age," she sniffed, hiding her pleasure at his respect.

* * * * *

"Bedford?" Gisburne gasped. "Sweet Jesu! And by noon!"

He had read the message a second time before he would believe what it said. He could read -- one could not call oneself a Norman gentleman without at least that much scholarship -- but it was not one of his more practiced skills. A few of the longer words baffled him, but the gist of the message was clear -- The Lord High Sheriff of Nottingham would return to his seat by noon the next day, accompanied by a guest -- the Duke of Bedford himself!

Gisburne was shaking by the time he put the parchment down. A royal guest, and less than a day's notice...

De Rainault obviously planned for him to disgrace himself before the Duke.

"Well, I'll be damned if I will!" he vowed. He looked up and scanned the crowd in the Hall, looking for the castle seneschal. "Edgar!"

The young knight never noticed when one of the pages hovering nearby put down his ale stoup and vanished into the corridor.

* * * * *

Four outlaws moved as quietly as grass grows, entering the stables where the Sheriff's horses were kept. It seemed the safest place to be; the rest of the castle boiled like a kicked hornets' nest. People ran everywhere, and most of the guardsmen were gathered in the main courtyard -- with visible reluctance. They had amassed a large quantity of lumber, and were being organized into groups to build something; sometimes, when someone yelled especially loudly -- as one sergeant was wont to do -- they could make out his words as he sent men for supplies -- saws, nails, hammers.

"Gallows," Little John said suddenly. "They're building a gallows."

Once said, it was obvious. What else would they need in such a hurry?

"Oh, no!" Much choked back a sob. "We can't let them hang Robin...!"

"Lad, lad... We're here to make sure they don't." John put a hand on the boy's shoulder and pushed him back into the straw. "Just keep quiet, or we'll have them all in here. And we'll all be in line to use yonder."

Much subsided, but Marion was not as easily calmed.

"How are we going to find him in there?" she whispered. "I know the castle fairly well, but he could be anywhere in it, and we can't just go wandering about, hoping to find him..."

Her question left them all silent for a moment. Then Nasir spoke. "Is there a physician here? A surgeon?"

She blinked. "Of course! Master Giscard!"

John smiled grimly. "Surely Robin's in his care, then. Gisburne wouldn't want to risk his dying before he can be presented to the Sheriff in chains."

Much's face lit up with a smile. "All we have to do, then, is find Master Giscard's rooms? Marion, you know where they are, don't you?"

She was not as cheered. "Yes, I know where they are, if he hasn't moved. But it's a busy place, and someone is sure to see us."

"How? Everyone's out here," John pointed out.

That was something of an exaggeration, and they all knew it. But nothing could be accomplished by hiding in the stable all night. One by one, Nasir first, they sneaked out of the stables and into the castle through an unguarded postern gate.

* * * * *

"Can you bend your knee?" Maude inquired.

Robin, very pale and with his lower lip tight between his teeth, did not answer, but simply tried. With the help of both his hands, he managed to do as she asked. Dickon put a strong hand on his ankle to keep his foot from slipping.

The woman nodded. "Good, good. Hold still, now." She went back into her bag, this time coming up with another small pot and a much-folded length of old, threadbare linen.

"What's in the pot?" Robin asked as she began to smear the mixture over the wound. He had to force the words out from between clenched teeth; her touch was gentle, but the wound was raw.

"Goose-grass and adder's tongue, alehoof and comfrey," she replied. "All to dry and cool the wound, and to bring its lips together that it may heal the quicker."

"I thought it smelled familiar."

The salve applied, she began to wrap the wound in the linen, taking her time, and not binding it tightly, but only firmly, so the rest of the leg did not go numb. Robin lay back, panting; it did not hurt much, but it hurt deeply, and he was still very tired. He was almost asleep when he heard new voices pitched high with urgency, and he opened his eyes to look.

Dickon was at the door, talking to another guardsman and a liveried page who didn't look above ten years old. The boy was nearly in tears, and both Dickon and the guardsman looked grim. Maude finished binding up his leg and offered him another cup of the camomile tea.

He shook his head. "No, it'll make me sleepy." He watched Dickon's expression, although he couldn't hear the men's words. After a few moments, the sergeant sent the page away, and the guardsman closed the door.

"What is it?" Maude asked, worried by his silence.

"The lad was serving ale at supper," her husband answered quietly. "A messenger came from the Sheriff. He's due back tomorrow, about noon, and he's bringing the Duke of Bedford with him."

Robin understood the implications at once. "And with a royal Duke to impress, he and Gisburne will put on quite a show, won't they?"

"Aye," Dickon nodded. "And you'll be in the heart of it."

* * * * *

Six miles from Nottingham, Friar Tuck and Will Scarlet were having the time of their misspent lives. They had laid a plain trail up a high bank overlooking a deep pool, then jumped down into the water and dug away at the base of the bank. When the sergeant and four of his men stepped up on the bank to figure out where their quarry had gone, the bank gave way, dunking the five mailed soldiers into six feet of water. No one drowned, but they were muddy and uncomfortable, and their armour began to rust. Will and Tuck escaped safely, sending back peals of mocking laughter when they heard the curses that meant their trap had been sprung.

They occasionally pelted the soldiers with fruit. Their targets thought it was just to be annoying, and that was certainly part of their reason. But a while after the trap at the pool, Will finally found what he'd been looking for.

"Brother Tuck, you'd best run on a bit," he advised as he broke off a forked sapling and braced it under the tree branch above him. "You sure can't outrun these soldiers."

Tuck looked up at the hornets' nest Will plainly was bent on acquiring, and swallowed hard. "What are you going to do with it?" he asked nervously.

"That should be obvious, even to you! Imagine being trapped in chain-mail while hornets buzz around you!"

The friar tucked up his cassock and hurried along the trail. He wanted nothing at all to do with hornets if he could manage it.



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woods
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Will waited until his companion was out of sight, then climbed the tree. The hornets' nest was hanging from a light, filmy branch that waved with every breeze; he hoped the insects inside would not be too upset by the motions he had to make to cut it free. Hopefully, the forked stick bracing the branch from below would keep the nest from moving enough to anger its inhabitants.

The plan worked like a charm. Will freed the nest without annoying the hornets, waited until the soldiers were near enough, then threw it as hard as he could -- right into their midst.

The reaction from the hornets was predictable. They poured from the violated nest and attacked the soldiers, whom they held responsible for the assault on their home. Will fled, with the sounds of screaming soldiers ringing in his ears.

* * * * *

Sir Guy of Gisburne paced back and forth in the main Hall. Edgar, the seneschal, was busy somewhere -- or he had better be! The guardsmen were out in the courtyard, building a gallows. The cook and his staff were busy preparing a holy-day feast for their royal guest. Some drudges were cleaning out the guest chambers, and making sure there were no fleas or spiders or other vermin to greet the Duke. The sleeping chamber's mattress had been burnt, and a fresh one was being stuffed with green pine boughs and fragrant herbs -- hops, for peace, and pennyroyal, to keep fleas away.

All in all, the knight was reasonably sure he had a plan for every eventuality. When the Sheriff arrived with the royal Duke, Nottingham Castle would have a royal welcome ready for them.

Out in the courtyard, the guardsmen laboured mightily, striving to follow the instructions of two different sergeants, as well as a professional carpenter who kept contradicting every order the sergeants gave. Finally, when they had to tear down two hours' work because it wobbled dangerously and would not hold a man's weight, the senior sergeant told the carpenter that, if he could do better, he was welcome to the job. Then he and his junior retired.

It was well after midnight. The guardsmen were tired and short-tempered. And no one would be able to sleep all night, for the sounds of hammering and cursing from the courtyard were clearly audible, and disturbed everyone in the castle.

* * * * *

"Come on, try."

Robin made a face. Dickon had, from somewhere, brought him a crutch, but the idea of actually putting any weight on his wounded leg was one he faced with reluctance. It hurt from any movement at all. "I don't know if this is going to work."

"It has to," Maude pointed out as she packed up her kit. "It's this, or we leave you here, and the Sheriff hangs you tomorrow. So try."

She was right, and he was wasting time, and risking all their lives by procrastinating. Robin sighed, took a firm hold on the crutch, and pushed himself to his feet.

He wobbled unsteadily, but Dickon lent him some support. After a moment or two to become accustomed to the idea, he managed to stand up.

"There you are!" Maude nodded in approval. "Now, there's no place we can safely hide you here."

We have to get you back to Sherwood."

"I can't make any speed like this," he pointed out, indicating the crutch.

"You won't have to," Dickon grinned. "We're going to borrow some of the Sheriff's horses, and we'll be gone before they even realize it."

Robin frowned. "You're coming with me?"

He shrugged. "We can't very well just put you on a horse and let you go. You're in no condition to be left alone."

"You won't be able to come back, you know," the outlaw said quietly. "If you vanish with me, the Sheriff will know you helped me escape, and he'll outlaw you, too."

Maude went to stand beside her husband. "We can learn to live in the woods, I think. But there's no need. My cousins who used to live in Loxley and fled now live in Codrin. We can go there. No one from Nottingham will ever find us."

Robin closed his eyes for a moment. He had been barely six years old when Loxley village was burned and the people put to the sword. Some of the memories were still vivid enough to wake him from sleep. Then he shook himself, nearly losing his balance in the process, and smiled wanly at his friends. "As long as you really understand what you're doing..."

"Oh, yes, we understand, Robin. We would not be doing it unwillingly or unthinkingly."

He grinned. "All right, then, let's go."

* * * * *

With Marion guiding them and Nasir leading, the four outlaws sneaked into the castle. While Marion knew where the chirurgion's chambers had been and probably still were, she had never been free to prowl the castle as a child might, and was unfamiliar with the back corridors. All she could do was keep them heading in the right direction.

The sounds of hammering were muffled, but they all knew the gallows was growing in the courtyard; the knowledge spurred them on.

They had been creeping through the empty stone corridors for a long while before the sounds of approaching voices sent them all back into the shadows, flat against the wall. Nasir stood just at the corner, both swords at the ready.

The voices came toward them, but so slowly that the tension became unbearable.

Marion leaned against the wall, her head back and her eyes closed, gritting her teeth against a desire to scream. She marvelled at Nasir's total control; he didn't move in the least, and his was a rather awkward position, with his twin swords held before his face. He looked like a spider waiting for a moth to strike his web -- and, like the spider, he did not move at all while he waited. He did not even seem to breathe.

The voices they heard were low-pitched, and spoke only occasionally; it was impossible to distinguish any words. Marion wondered how much longer she could stand the suspense. Much, hugging the

wall beside her, trembled with his efforts not to cry out. Behind him, Little John pushed his shoulders into the wall and ground his teeth, fingering his quarterstaff longingly.

Then everything happened at once.

The people talking came abreast of the side corridor where the outlaws waited. Nasir tensed without moving in the slightest. One of the newcomers, a woman, caught a glimpse of his scimitars in the light of the torch she carried, and gasped as she flinched backward. Nasir moved, quick as a cat, and Marlon gasped as the blades flashed in the torchlight, expecting to see the woman's head roll on the floor.

Then a familiar voice snapped out a single word. "Hold!"

It wasn't loud, but the tone pierced each one of them to the soul.

Nasir froze for a moment, then deliberately stepped back, lowering his swords, but not sheathing them.

Marlon gasped again. "Robin...!"

Then she was holding him, and John and Much were crowding close, and everyone was talking at once -- everyone but Nasir, who moved a few steps away, smiling faintly, and stood watch.

Robin laughed, and tried hard not to lean on Marlon. "I'm all right, really!"

But it was some time before they all calmed down enough to talk sensibly. Robin introduced Dickon and Maude, and leaned on John while he explained Dickon's plan.

"That'll work, sure," the big man approved. "But do you know why they decided to start building their gallows in the middle of the night? It seemed passing strange to us."

Robin, Maude, and Dickon traded knowing looks. It was Maude who answered, explaining what they knew of the Sheriff's imminent arrival, and of his royal guest. Marlon and the others understood at once.

"If all that be so, we should be gone from here a good long time before the Sheriff comes," John stated. "He'll surely want to see you as soon as Gisburne tells him he's got you."

That was nothing less than the truth, and they all knew it.

Robin sighed. "I suppose you're right. We'd best be going..." Then he turned to Dickon and Maude. "You don't have to run now, you know." The sergeant stopped short, about to pick up his wife's pack. "I'm not alone now. You can stay in safety."

There was a moment of silence. Then Maude looked up at her husband. "We don't have to stay long," she pointed out slowly. "But we wouldn't have to leave as penniless vagabonds, either."

The point was well-taken. They had been about to leave behind everything they owned, for to do otherwise would have been to risk discovery and capture.

The Hooded Man smiled tiredly. "When you're ready to go, make your way up the creek to the white poplar grove. Camp there for the night, and one of us will join you, and escort you to Codlin.

"There's no need for you to go alone."

The couple glanced at one another. Then the woman nodded, and Dickon smiled. "All right, we'll do it that way. And thank you."

"No, it is I who must thank you," Robin demurred. "You two saved my life, and I won't forget."

They looked embarrassed, and Marion smiled winningly at them. "We're all very grateful to you both," she told them, "but you'd better go back now, before someone notices, and wonders why you can't be found."

"You're right," the sergeant said with a nod. "And we must arrange for our friend Jamie to be somewhere else when Gisburne discovers your escape. I don't want him blamed."

"Too right!" The erstwhile prisoner grinned, then glanced over his shoulder at the way out.

Dickon laughed softly. "Herne guide your steps, Robin. And your arrows!"

"Herne protect you both, as well." He raised one hand in a priest's gesture of benediction, then turned, leaning on Marion almost as much as on his crutch. The others trailed along behind.

Robin managed to get as far as the stable door before he collapsed, panting, his head swimming. Marion cried out as he sagged against her. Little John leaped to catch him, and Robin let himself fall.

"Robin? Robin...!"

"'M a' righ'..." He felt strong arms support him, and knew Little John was there. The reassurance was quite enervating; his friends had him, and they would take care of him. Then he felt an arm behind his knees, and braced himself in anticipation of pain.

Little John rose to his feet with Robin in his arms. The sudden movement, and the pressure on his wound, sent a hot flare of agony through the injured man. His vision blurred, and he thought he was going to pass out. Dimly, through a fog of pain, he heard voices around him -- Marion, worried and hushed; Little John, firmly reassuring; Much, who sounded very young, and very frightened. A grim silence led their small party; he knew it had to be Nasir.

The Saracen helped Little John get Robin astride the sedate black mare they had selected. Marion held the horse's head, and Much kept watch; neither was strong enough to lift the limp weight of their half-fainting leader. Once mounted, Robin managed to keep his seat, but that was all. Marion spoke softly to the mare, then walked around to her near side to mount.

Nasir backed away to give her room. "Wait for us."

She threw him a quick smile, then leapt agilely onto the horse's rump and wriggled close to Robin, who was already drooping like a cut flower in hot water. She reached around him to take the reins from Little John, and kept the mare still until the others were all mounted as well -- Nasir on Gisburne's sorrel gelding, John on a big chestnut shire, and Much on a small bay pony. Then she put her heels to the mare's sides and urged her out.

They ducked as they went through the stable door, then kicked their horses into a trot, hoping no one from the castle would notice or hear them over the din of building in the courtyard. Nasir,

easily the best mounted of them all, was the best rider; he lagged behind, covering their retreat. Marion led, heading straight into the deep woods, keeping to hard ground as much as she could. Tracking them, even in sunlight, would be difficult.

After the smokiness and half-light and hard-held fear in the castle, the coolness of the night-time forest was a magical balm. Even Robin perked up a little, although he did not speak, concentrating instead on staying in the saddle. Fortunately, the black mare had a smooth, steady trot that made it simple for him. He felt secure with Marion's arms around him, and he was not concerned about their escape. He could feel the forest around him like a living thing, a single giant organism, breathing and alive, happy to have him home.

* * * * *

Back in Nottingham Castle, Sir Guy of Gisburne prepared to greet his guests.



"Albion"

(By Mary Robertson)

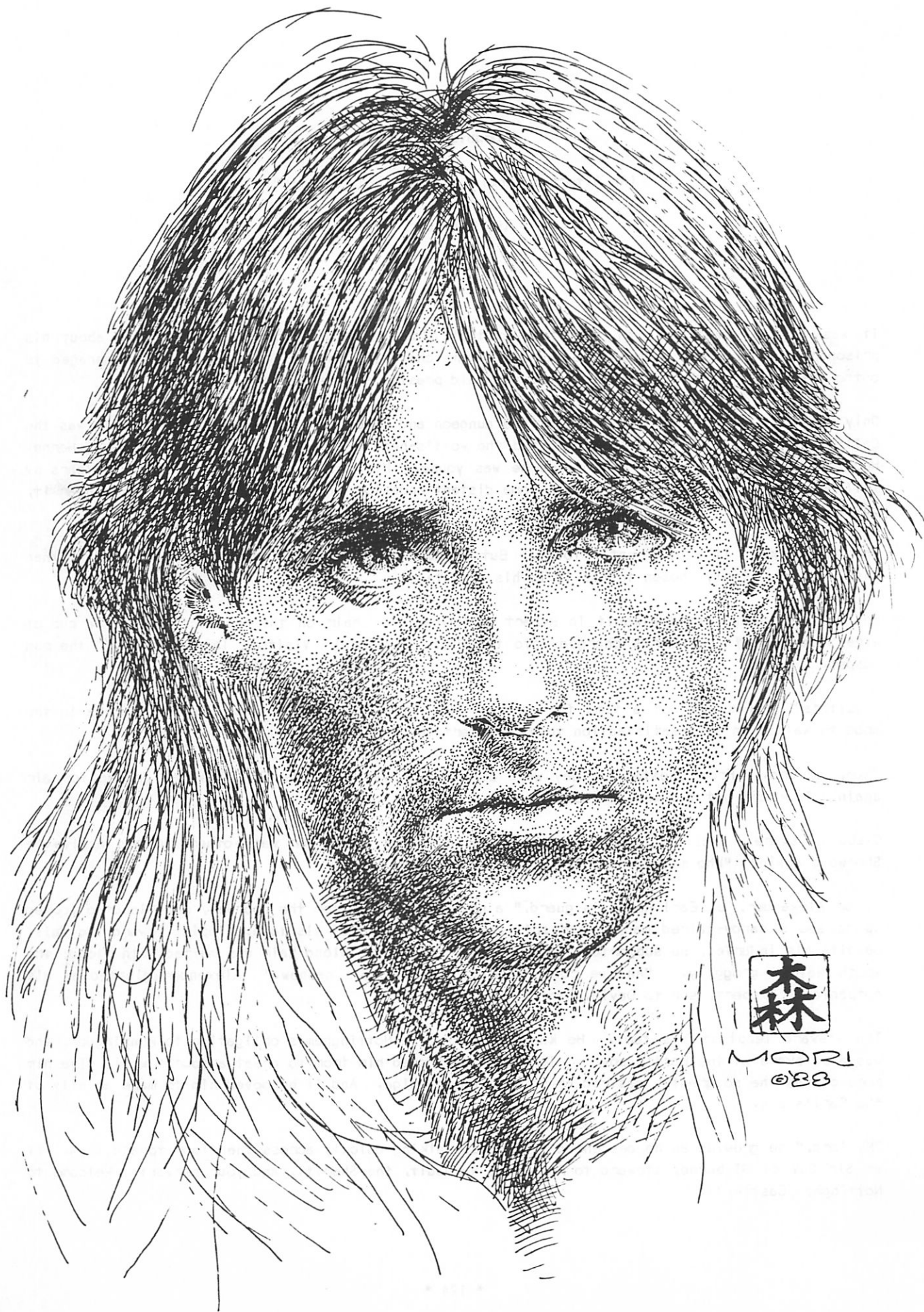
I saw at once it was the final stand,
The end of all upon that cursed hill --
Rebellion shattered by the Sheriff's hand,
And Sherwood bent once more beneath his will.

But Robin would not let me share that end.
He charged his Lady keep the myth alive,
Hold fast to mem'ry, trust to hope, and spend
My grief on those brave friends who yet survive.

He said, "One day, you'll know it's meant to be."
My very soul screamed out against the lie!
I could not grant he'd seen our destiny,
That I must live, while Robin Hood must die.

Despaired, I took Herne's tribute, and his trust.
I guard the sword, for Robin said I must.





MORI
088

"Double Helix"

(An Alternate Ending to "Tangled In Holly")

(By L.A. Carr)

It was with a great deal of satisfaction that Gisburne watched the shackles latch about his prisoner's wrists and ankles. He would take no chances with this capture. He had managed to outdo the Sheriff with this capture, and he would preside at the execution.

Only one thing disturbed him as he left the dungeon and headed back to the Great Hall. It was the Call that drew him to where they spotted the wolf's-head -- the Call for that pagan devil Herne. He knew the sound, and had ever since he was young. His mother had tried to calm his fears by telling him it might be the blood of some distant ancestor that gave him the ability to hear it, but he rejected that, and had clung even tighter to the Norman ways and the Church.

And he had kept it at bay until today. But he couldn't deny he'd heard the Call -- more than once. He had simply chosen to use it to his advantage.

He had only just seated himself in Robert de Rainault's chair on the dais and sent for a cup of wine when one of the guards charged into the Hall. "M'lord! Visitors in the bailey!" the man gasped.

"Visitors?" This was not a time for guests. The Sheriff was in London, and he was more in the mood to wallow in self-satisfaction than to entertain.

"Aye, m'lord. From Chester. They were attacked on Watling Street." The man gasped for air again. "And all but two were killed."

Gisburne swore. Was this the revenge of Robin Hood's band? Or were other outlaws active in Sherwood again? "Who might they be?"

"I am Alexander, of Earl Ranulf's guard," a new voice spoke from the doorway, and Gisburne looked up to see a sandy-haired man, blood spilling down one side of his face, limping toward the dais. Despite his injuries, he supported a much younger man, whose blond hair was matted with blood; the youth walked groggily. "And we rode escort for our lord's nephew." Alexander glanced at his companion. "Robert, son to David, Earl of Huntingdon."

The steward leapt to his feet. He knew all too well Nottingham's obligation to Huntingdon, and was also aware of the Earl's power. To have a debt owed him from so great a source would give him more of what he so greatly desired -- power, and prestige. And it behooved him to make an ally of the Earl's son.

"My lord," he greeted as he descended the steps, walking quickly across the floor toward them. "I am Sir Guy of Gisburne, steward to Robert de Rainault, the Sheriff, and your servant. Welcome to Nottingham Castle."

The younger man raised his head, grey eyes hazed with pain. "We appreciate your hospitality, Sir Guy," he said softly in a hesitant voice. "But I fear more may be attacked on the road while we attend to pleasantries."

"Of course!" Gisburne mentally kicked himself for overlooking the obvious. After such an assault, the Earl's son would want the criminals caught and executed. "Can you tell me what your attackers looked like?" Perhaps this time, he would catch the rest of Robin Hood's band.

"Outlaws," Alexander answered. "Ten, maybe twelve of them. Rough men, with swords and bows and quarterstaves. They dressed to blend with the forest. All the same, yes?"

The knight nodded, but knew better. The clothes and weapons were right, but there were too many to be the ones he wanted. Still, the Sheriff disliked the thought of any outlaws in Sherwood, and attacking a nobleman was not to be tolerated. "Edward!" he bellowed, then noticed the wince that crossed the young lord's face. Instead of shouting the rest of his orders, he waited until the soldier was at his side. "Send out a guard... No, send out half the troop," he said, his mind moving quickly; he had an impression to make. "Find the outlaws who attacked my lord Chester's men. And kill them!"

"My men..." the youth began.

"And bury the men on Watling Street. You'll find them." He didn't have time to fool with trivial details, but since they mattered to the young nobleman...

"I will go with you, and show you where..." Alexander said, but broke off as his companion laid a hand on his arm.

"No, you are wounded as well..." The grey eyes turned to Gisburne. "Sir Guy, might there be some place for my guard to rest, and someone to attend him? I fear his wounds are more serious than he thinks."

"Of course, my lord. Edward, send one of your men to attend to the guard. And for the barber to tend my lord..."

He was cut off by a wave of the younger man's hand. "I need no tending. Perhaps just a place to rest..." The soft voice was commanding.

"Certainly," Gisburne amended. "I will have the turret room readied for you. Edward..."

* * * * *

Will Scarlet cut a clear path through Sherwood, only two things on his mind -- killing Gisburne, and rescuing Robin from his clutches. Seems the arrow Marion fired into his backside didn't do a suitable job...

He heard the others behind him, but paid them no mind. He would lead the way to Robin, the way to Gisburne's death, and those who followed him were welcome. But nothing any of them said would deter him from his path.

Before him, the trail began to cloud, as if a fog rolled in, and its appearance in the midst of the day slowed his steps. He kept going, however, until a voice called from the hill ahead and to

one side of him. "Will Scarlet!"

Marion gasped, and John's quiet voice murmured, "Herne." His own eyes were on the Being who stood with antlers stretched into the mist and staff upraised.

"Hear Me, Will Scarlet," the fog-shrouded figure called to him. "Your path to My son has been cleared for you, but I warn you to be cautious. Many dangers still lurk on your way."

"You heard the Call," he accused the Ancient One, and heard Marion gasp again, shocked at his brashness. "Why didn't You help Robin? Why did You let him be taken?"

The staff slowly lowered to the ground, and for a brief moment, Will tasted fear. He knew the Hornéd God's power. "Matters are far greater than you know them to be, greater than any man knows them to be. What was done had to be done. Now, go for Robin. Now is his time."

Before Will could reply, before he could muster the words or the courage, the mist swirled up and took Herne from before them, leaving only an empty hill.

* * * * *

Robert sat alone in the room Gisburne had set aside for him, a room generally used by King John when the monarch was in Nottingham. The steward was trying hard -- too hard -- to impress him. And the headache he had did not lend itself to being impressed.

He was concerned about what had happened in the forest. His step-mother's brother had forced the escort upon him for his return home. None of them had seen the bandits approaching, and they had paid for their lapse with their lives. He'd seen them go down -- Christian first, a sword splitting his skull, then Richard, with an arrow through his chest. Alexander had stayed nearest to him, but the dagger run through his leg and then across his face made their escape a near thing. He'd drawn his own sword, and it had tasted blood. At least one of the bandits would not return to the forest.

But it wasn't the attack that weighed so heavily on his mind. Instead, he remembered the Call he'd given in those moments of panic, calling to the Hornéd God Who protected the forests and those who dwelt therein. It was something his parents had discouraged, his father declaring him a throw-back to his twice-great grandmother, the Princess Margaret, last of the pure Saxons in the family.

His father discouraged all his interests in the Old Ways, and demanded he attend Mass at least once daily. But his father's Church left him feeling incomplete, and he listened eagerly to the teachings of the guards who still knew the Old Ways, and gained their confidence enough to be taught the use of the quarterstaff -- a talent that had helped to save his life that day.

David of Huntingdon disapproved of his studies, and had sent him to Chester, where Ranulf employed no such men. He was glad he'd been sent for in time for Lammas.

He had Called for the protection of the Hornéd One that day on the road through Sherwood Forest, and that protection had come. He'd felt the Presence, and not even his father could convince him it hadn't happened. But he would tell few others about the Forest Spirit's answer to his Call; very few, even among those at Huntingdon, would understand.

He lay back against the cushions. Gisburne, on the way up the winding stairs, had insisted on

showing him some "prize" later when he had recovered. He questioned what the steward might have that could possibly be of interest, but agreed to meet with the man later, when his head stopped throbbing.

He had to be up to the knight's show. And he did need the rest.

* * * * *

Robin heard footsteps first, through the haze of pain that ran through his body and rammed hot pokers through his leg. He wanted to reach down, to make sure he hadn't imagined the bolt being cut away. Everything was a blinding blur since he'd been pulled from beneath the tree and brought back to the castle. And, chained to the wall, his leg useless, he knew he would not be able to escape this time -- at least, not alone. He could only keep his faith in Herne -- and in his friends.

The footsteps came closer, and with them came voices, one of them hatefully familiar. "This is quite a prize, I assure you, my lord," Gisburne said. "The Sheriff has pursued this wolf's-head ever since he escaped from the castle, and has had little success. But now..." Even through his pain, Robin could hear the gloating in the steward's voice.

Two men stopped before him, and the outlaw glared at Gisburne before turning to the younger man beside him. Even more finely dressed than the steward, the youth held himself with little of the arrogance of the knight. Rather, his face held concern, and his eyes...

For a moment, Robin ceased to look into a pair of misty-coloured eyes. He gazed instead into a still pond, at a reflection of himself. He shook his head, and the face returned to what it truly was.

"Not dangerous now, is he, my lord?" The shackles and his injured leg kept the prisoner from moving fast enough to avoid Gisburne's kick. The pain that followed sent his world spinning, and deafened him so the next words were as a whisper in his ears.

"I find all this less than amusing," the young nobleman said in a brittle tone that took the fire from Robin's head and leg. "Tell me, Sir Guy, is it necessary to keep him manacled so? One would think, wounded as he is, that there is little chance of his escape."

"Quite so, my lord. But his friends may attempt to come for him..."

"Is your castle not secure enough to hold off bandits? If not, perhaps I should seek shelter elsewhere for the night."

"Oh, quite secure, my lord."

"Then perhaps it might be possible for the man's shackles to be loosened. You certainly don't want him harmed any more, before you show your prize to the Sheriff." The young man's voice was icy.

"Of course, my lord," Gisburne replied subserviently, and summoned a guard. "Dickon, the manacles -- loosen them. A little."

"Aye, my lord," a voice answered -- a voice Robin knew.

"I have instructed the servants to prepare the finest of meals for you, my lord," the steward said, drawing his guest's attention from the prisoner. "It should be served soon. May I show you the stables in the meanwhile? The Sheriff has many fine mounts."

"I would prefer to check on Alexander..."

* * * * *

It was ridiculously easy to slip into the castle amidst all the turmoil. Marlon had never seen such a fuss, even when the King -- then only Prince John -- came to visit. Men and women hurried about, all as if on important errands.

"Smells like the Abbey when the Archbishop was coming," Tuck commented.

"A feast?" John asked. "What would they be celebrating?"

"Robin's capture," Will replied quietly.

"You'd think Gisburne would wait until the Sheriff gets back," Marlon observed. "He was always one to...show off."

"So what do we do now?" John demanded.

"Herne said the way was cleared. We just have to be careful." She looked around the bailey. "If we act as if we belong here and know where we're going, we won't be questioned. But we'd best stay out of sight of any guards. Robin's safety depends on it. And ours, too." She started across the courtyard, watching for the path Herne had said would be there.

* * * * *

The odours in the Hall didn't exactly agree with Robert's stomach, but he didn't want to upset his host any more than he already had. Gisburne wasn't happy about his reaction to the prisoner in the dungeon. But then, he himself wasn't too pleased with the steward's attitude, either. There was no need to abuse anyone that way, especially someone already wounded and in chains.

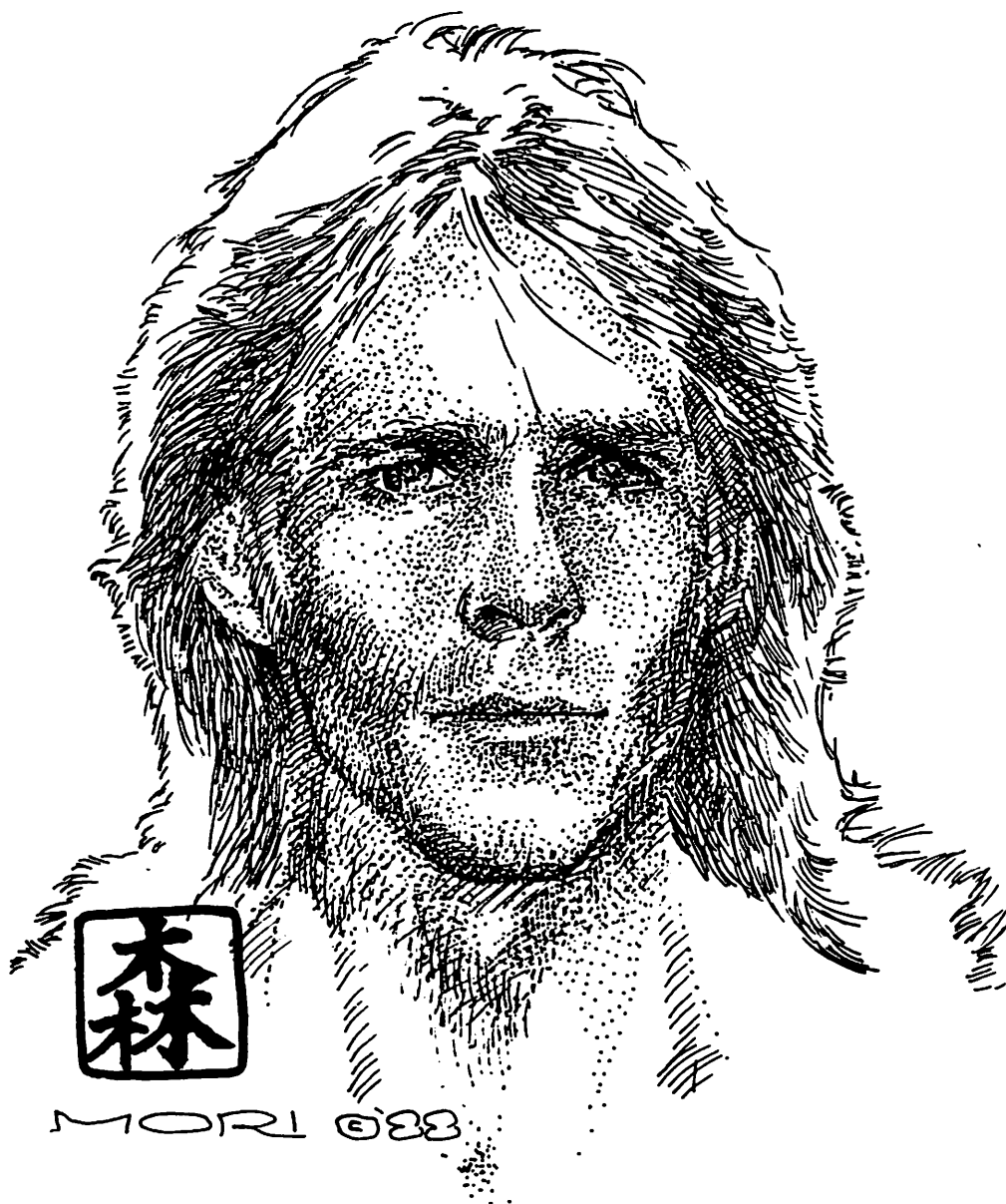
No, he wasn't overly impressed with the steward and his gloating ways, but his father had carefully taught him the need to act his rôle as nobleman and heir.

"How fares your guardsman, my lord?" Gisburne questioned around a mouthful of lamb. "The barber saw to him..."

"His injuries were grievous, as I feared. He is badly lamed from the wound to his leg, and the dagger put out one of his eyes. I doubt he will be able to continue his duties in the future." Although, as he had also suspected, his own injuries were far less serious than they looked. Most of the blood matting his hair had been from the sword that split Christian's skull; it had been easily washed away. All other remnants of the assault were put aside when he changed into fresh clothing.

The steward frowned. "I imagine we could find a place for him here..." he said hesitantly.

"That will not be necessary, Sir Guy. My father will reward him well, and he will always have a place at Huntingdon. We take care of our own."



"You have said little of my prize, my lord."

He had said little -- but had thought much of the young man shackled to the wall deep in the dungeon. He had heard of Robin in the Hood, heard the stories of the wolf's-head King Richard had once invited to accompany him to Normandy and the Holy Land. Only, the invitation was beset with treachery, and the outlaw and his men -- and a woman, too -- had escaped into Sherwood.

He remembered looking into the man's eyes, and looking beyond them, somehow. As he met the gaze of the dark-haired prisoner -- something he'd never expected from one of the lower classes -- he had seen a frightening reflection, and he clearly remembered the stab of burning pain in his right thigh -- the same place the Hooded Man was injured.

Robin Hood and his men were followers of Herne, children of the Forest Spirit. Has that anything to do with my Calling for the help of the Horned One? Is it the knowledge that his wound rightfully belongs to me? For he was sure that, not only could the Forest God hear the Call, but his followers could as well. The outlaw had been captured very near where he'd been attacked. And the arrow that caught the outlaw was rightfully the shaft that should have ended his own life.

"A wounded prize, Sir Guy, is always less of a thing to be praised. A skin marred by holes, for instance, or pewter that is scratched."

Gisburne struggled to curb his temper, and the young nobleman disliked him even more. The man wasn't even honest enough to be angry when insulted! "As you say, my lord," the steward replied in a carefully controlled voice. "But it is still a prize of high worth."

"And what do you plan to do with this prize of high..." He never finished. The moving shadows in the smoky Hall made his still-aching head pound, and his vision blurred. He slumped forward in his chair, the room spinning around him.

"Edward!" he heard the steward call, then felt a hand on his arm for a brief moment. "My lord, are you all right?"

He tried to answer, but his burning throat prevented it. "Edward! Escort my lord to his chambers at once, and bring him whatever he wants."

"My lord..." the man protested.



"Whatever it is will wait," Gisburne told him as Robert opened his eyes. "There are things that come first."

"Aye, my lord." And the hands that took the young nobleman's arms were gentle, but firm in their support.

"Call for the barber if necessary," the steward called after them. "He should still be about. And have someone feed this swill to the dogs. It may be poisoned."

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Little John breathed a sigh of relief as they got beyond the Great Hall and deeper into the castle. "Now where?" he whispered to Will and Marion, who had both been in parts of the building before.



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"The dungeon," Marlon answered. "That's where Gisburne would put him."

"Not the pit!" Much exclaimed, hysteria in his voice, and John approved of the hand Will clamped over the boy's mouth to silence him.

"He's probably chained somewhere, where Gisburne can look at his prize all he wants," Marlon said in disgust. "But how we're going to get past the guardroom, and then out again..."

"Herne's cleared our way so far. We can't lose faith now. There will be a way."

She nodded at the big man's words, and started off again.

* * * *

The faint clatter of footsteps on the stairs jerked Dickon awake, and he scrambled out into the hall, and cursed silently as the other three guards followed him. He fully expected the Hooded Man's companions to come for him; he'd seen their loyalty at the forest rites. If there were other guards when they came, they might be captured...

But his fears were alleviated when he saw a guardsman come down the stone corridor. "Nicholas..." he began.

The guard turned a frightened face toward him, and held a finger to his lips. "You'll wake him!"

Dickon frowned. Wake who? He strode down the corridor, to look beyond Nicholas, and froze, his breath catching in his throat.

Walking slowly along the stone corridor, eyes open but unseeing, was the young nobleman, Gisburne's guest. Willy, given the task of watching over the Huntingdon heir as a reward for his good work in capturing the Hooded Man, followed him. "What...?"

"He is asleep, sir, and we fear he is possessed. You know what chamber he has..." Nicholas whispered.

Dickon nodded. For a long time, there had been strange noises from that room, suspected ghosts that not even Abbot Hugo could exorcise. Stories said King John had slept there once, when he first took control of Nottingham. A ghost possessed him while he slept, and he had been awakened before it left. That gave the spirit dominion over the King forever, replacing his natural soul.

It was obvious Willy and Nicholas believed every bit of those stories...

"Why is he here?" Dickon asked as Robert and Willy came closer. "And why you, Nicholas?"

"We cannot steer him. But where he goes, we go. If he were to fall, or..." He shivered, and moved aside as the nobleman approached, his escort a few steps behind.

It was easy to see why they believed him possessed. His eyes were hazy, misted, and he mumbled faint words in neither the English of the lower classes or the French of the Sheriff and his kind. Dickon fought to hide his reaction as one familiar sound struck his ears -- a name he never expected to hear from one of the young nobleman's rank.



"Uh..." Mitchell began. Preston gaped.

"You said yourself, my lord, the wolf's-head is not likely to escape," Dickon said quickly. And, somewhere in the back of his mind, he remembered a conversation of that sort. "We felt it more important to safeguard the Earl's son." With a nod of his head, he indicated young Robert.

"Well, he seems perfectly safe now. Get back down there! I want at least one man with that damned outlaw from now until his execution!"

Both Dickon and Preston took off at a run. The steward continued to frown at the others, who were crowded around the entranced nobleman. Robert stood with his eyes open, staring at a blank wall.

"Possessed?" Gisburne asked the man who had shot the outlaw earlier that day.

"Aye, my lord. We were outside his door, as you ordered, and then it opened, and he came out. We..." He looked to his companion for confirmation. "We thought to ask him if there was anything he needed, if we could do anything, but he didn't seem to hear us. Then he started mumbling something, and we couldn't understand it, and he started walking as if he couldn't see. But yet, his eyes were open, and he walked into no walls." He shook his head. "Ghosts, my lord. Would they not want...?" He broke off quickly.

Gisburne snorted again. Ghosts! Demons! Possession!

But Preston believed it, and he himself had seen signs of demons, from such as the Baron de Belleme. I suppose it's possible... He'd heard the stories of the supposed possession of the King, and had scoffed as any Christian man would. But were they true...?

Running footsteps caught his attention. Preston reappeared on the landing. "My lord! The wolf's-head! He's gone!"

"Gone?" the knight repeated softly. Then his rage exploded. "Gone?" he bellowed. "Every man you can raise, Preston! Get them out! Find that man, and anyone with him! And kill them all as soon as you do!"

"Sir Guy?"

He didn't even turn. "Your damned outlaw has managed to escape!" he snarled, then instantly wished to have his tongue cut out as he realized to whom he spoke.

"Escape?" Robert slowly stepped into his line of sight. "From your dungeon?"

"My lord, I..."

The nobleman waved a dismissing hand. "If you have escaped prisoners, you have matters to attend to. But I do hope the rest of my night here will be safe -- and reasonably undisturbed." His voice was brittle as ice.

"Aye, my lord..."

* * * * *

Tuck looked worriedly at the young man now almost totally supported by Nasir and Much. Robin was pale, and dark blood soaked both the crude bandage and the leggings he wore. Marion led them, and he knew Will and John were close behind, bow and sword guarding their backs.

But they couldn't outrun the guards for long. Carrying Robin so carefully, to avoid hurting him or causing him more pain, slowed them too much. Their best protection lay in being able to move swiftly.

None of them questioned Marion, though. She seemed to know where she was going, moving swiftly through the forest as if following some invisible path. And the friar wasn't sure she hadn't found one. After Robin, she seemed most attuned to the forest, even though brought up in fine places as she had been.

Will hurried toward them. "The guards're coming closer," he gasped. "We've got to get somewhere they can't find us."

"A little further," Marion answered, never altering her pace. Nasir and Much followed, and Tuck could only turn to his shabby friend and shrug. Will shook his head, but dropped back again, sword in his hand.

The mist seemed more natural this time, rising from the water of a broad stream Tuck didn't remember ever seeing before. At the water's edge, near a fall that obscured a rock outcropping, a Man stood on a raft; He was dressed in hides, and long, grey hair fell to His shoulders.

Robin's lady stopped at the water's edge. "Herne!"

One of the Man's hands lifted a pole in answer, and she gestured for Nasir and Much to set her husband on the raft. Tuck watched carefully, but the Hooded Man hardly seemed to notice.

"I will care for him." Tuck had to believe it. "Go, now. Hide yourselves. He will come to you again." He poled the raft into the mist, and He and His son vanished.

"Soldiers!" Will cried as he and Little John reached the stream.

"Run!" Marion ordered, and they scattered.

* * * * *

Robert was grateful for the hands that helped him mount his horse, sure he wouldn't be able to do so unaided. His night had been anything but restful, and he knew he didn't have the strength to climb into the saddle. He was also grateful the mount he had with him was a gentle animal, and not his usual spirited steed.

"My lord..."

And he really wasn't up to Gisburne, either. That was part of the reason he wanted to leave so early. The steward was overly solicitous, trying to make up for his sharp words. And trying too hard, it seemed. He wasn't really upset with the knight, but rather was displeased with some of his actions and attitudes.

And he had been pleased to hear of the outlaw's escape. That was something he couldn't explain. But he had seen something in the man, something he could sense within himself. He owed the Hooded

Man something for the price he'd forced upon him, too, for the protection he'd taken.

"I will send your guard back when I reach Huntingdon, Sir Guy." That was another thing. With Christian, Richard, and the others dead, he had no escort except Alexander -- and one crippled, half-blinded man was not guard enough. Every man I take is one less to look for the outlaws... So he'd demanded the escort.

"My lord, I..."

"Your apology is accepted. Again."

I'm tired of him. He's so desperate for acceptance and appreciation... I think I liked him best when he yelled at me; at least then, he was being honest...

Robert settled his blue riding cape more comfortably across his shoulders, and nodded to the guard at the head of the escort. "Dickon, if you would...?"

The company moved out, and southward.

* * * * *

The cave was dim, but the fire on the high stone altar cast enough light for Robin to see by. There wasn't much to see. The stone walls were nearly bare, the water was quiet, and the blankets around him were ordinary, dark and rough.

He wasn't complaining, though. The pain in his leg had receded to a dull throbbing; the burning agony was gone, and the wound was tightly bound. He was free of the fever, warm, dry, and safe. And the Hornéd One had said he could rejoin his friends in the morning.

"I don't understand, though," he said. "How would a Norman lord come to know the Call?"

The grey-haired Man turned, walked to where he sat, and crouched down. "Are you so sure he was a Norman?"

"He was obviously a nobleman, and someone important, from the way Gisburne spoke to him. Yet he knew the Call, and used it. And You answered... I thought only one of Your Own..." He stopped at the look on the Ancient One's face.

"He is one of Mine," Herne answered. "He has been Chosen, but has not yet been Called."

"A nobleman?"

"All of My sons are born thus, no matter what their station. When the Call comes, he will answer."

His ringing voice sent a shiver through His listener. No one could refuse such a Call; Robin knew that all too well.

But he no longer worried about a Norman lord being one of the Hornéd God's Chosen. He had looked into the young man's eyes, and seen his soul reflected there. He would not forget.

And in that memory, he felt safe.



"Eulogy for an Enemy"

(By Mary Robertson)

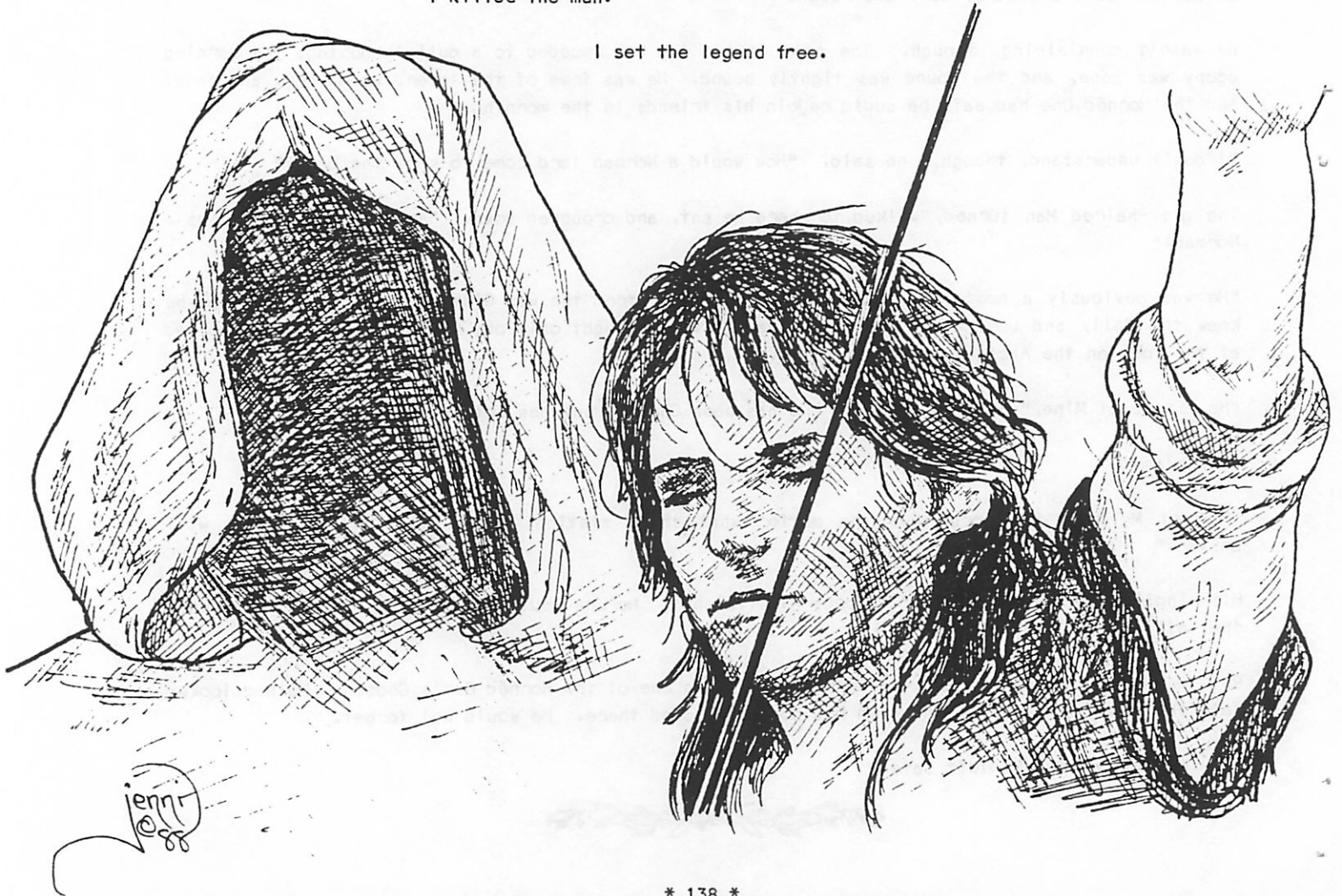
I could have sworn I killed the man this day.
I saw him die. I knew that I had won.
Should I have placed his head upon display
As further proof my duty had been done?

The serfs would not accept, would not believe
What even blooded soldiers choose to doubt,
And twenty stinking heads could not relieve
My hunger to set Sherwood's band to rout.

His shadow haunts me even from the grave,
A phantom born of blood and bone and hate,
A wolf's-head wielding power kings might crave --
The hero I, unknowing, helped create.

Dear God! Will Robin never let me be?
I killed the man.

I set the legend free.



A Few Choice Words...

Another issue of THE SONIC SCREWDRIVER has come to an end, and it's time for us to think about next year, and to thank all those many people who brought the pieces together, and made this fanzine possible.

We've had a tremendous amount of fun doing this fourth issue of THE SONIC SCREWDRIVER, and are looking forward to TSS #5. For next year, we already have two ROBIN OF SHERWOOD stories, one by a familiar writer, the other by a talented newcomer. And two DOCTOR WHO stories, featuring Jon Pertwee's Doctor #3 and Tom Baker's Doctor #4. BLAKE'S 7 will be represented as well, and who knows what new delights the mail will bring in the months to come?

It will be an effort to out-do this issue, however. There were so many things to choose from, and so many people to thank...

First, our writers, talented story-tellers who have managed in their different tales to make us laugh, cry, gasp, and wonder. Some of them have been with us before -- Linda Ruth Pfonner, Kathie Hughes, Mary Robertson, and Barbara Mater; some are new, appearing for the first time in this issue -- L.A. Carr, Jeanine Hennig, Jeannie Webster, and Vicci Cook. All have tremendous skill, and have proven -- to us, at least -- that they are masters of their chosen craft.

Excellent stories indeed, accompanied by equally excellent art. Gennie Summers, Pat Posadas, Kate Soehnlen, Toni Hardeman, Joan Hanke-Woods -- all familiar to our readers, and all better than ever this time around. Jeanine Hennig, new to us, although well-known in fandom, whose artistic talent is a match for her writing skills, and a welcome addition to our pages. And, of course, our cover artist, Jean Clissold, whose "Summer-Crowned King" is truly a work of art...

The Panasonic Screwdriver is a wonderful and complex machine, and its SpellScan program is a marvel of a dictionary; but it doesn't understand certain things, can't recognize that a specific word may be spelled correctly but still be wrong, and thinks "inthe" is a word -- although we're not sure in what language. So there will always be work for good proofreaders, and we think we have the best anywhere. Mary Greeley, Lisa Mudano, David Morgan, Gloria Bloom, Wayne Sipia, and L.A. Carr are the ones who make us look so professional this time, and we cannot thank them enough.

Last of all, but never, never least, what would we do without you, our readers, who have honoured us with your faith and trust and loyalty -- to say nothing of your excellent taste in fanish literature and art?

What can we say? Except "Thank you!" For we do thank you with all our heart...

By this time next year, we hope to be up to our armpits in little wolf puppies, and buried under piles of exceptional manuscripts and art. Until then, we wish you all peace, joy, and happiness.

May Herne protect us.



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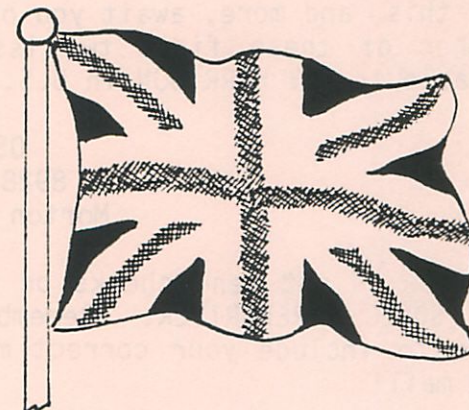
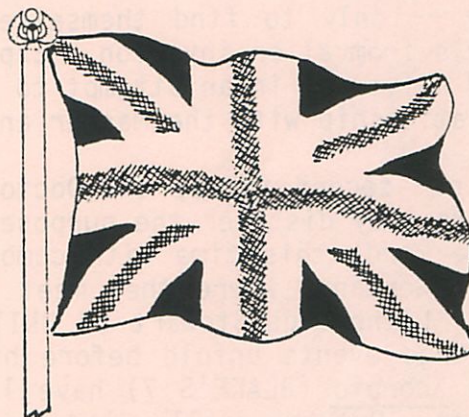
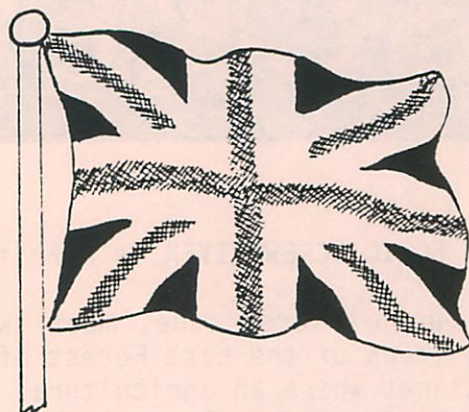
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In our premiere issue, meet two charming drones and their human master amidst the trees of the Last Forest of Earth, and travel with the Doctor and Jamie to a planet where an agricultural colony is dying, its settlers unable to pay for the basic needs of survival -- while surrounded by incredible mineral wealth. Join the Time Lord and his companion Tegan as they visit Nafnelor for a holiday -- only to find themselves once again involved in a struggle to save a world from alien invasion. Explore some of the many intricacies of the DOCTOR WHO universe, in an attempt to unravel such mysteries as the Doctor's age, his relationship with the Master and Romana, his true name...

In our second issue, the Doctor and his companions travel to Central America, where they discover the purpose of the mysterious drawings of Nazca. Then the Time Lord, this time with companions Ben and Polly, inadvertently journey to Nazi Germany, where they meet that nation's malevolent Master. Next, Brigadier Lethbridge-Stewart of UNIT experiences a most peculiar Christmas Eve, as strange events unfold before his disbelieving eyes. And finally, the crew of the Scorpio (BLAKE'S 7) have landed on Gauda Prime, where they met with disaster. But who really died there? And who survived?

All this, and more, await you on the pages of THE SONIC SCREWDRIVER. To order either of these first two issues, send a check or money order for \$12.00, payable to JOY HARRISON in U.S. dollars only, to:

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Did you ever wonder what made brilliant, likeable Ed Straker the cold, embittered head of S.H.A.D.O., and leader of the fight against alien invasion? And everyone knows heroes like Roj Blake do all sorts of heroic things -- but while they're at it, who does the laundry? Join Vila Restal aboard the Liberator, and find out what happens when he makes his first attempt at household chores.

A simple (!) explanation of the game of cricket leads the Doctor to underwater adventure with Jacques-Yves Cousteau and the crew of Calypso. And the Hooded Man is a target once again, but this time, Gisburne actually has him helpless -- and Herne himself may not be able to save Robin from certain death!

Finally, THE SONIC SCREWDRIVER #3 presents a very special feature. "ROBIN HOOD: An Artist's View" is a set of five portraits by Karen River, easily removed from the zine and presented in a format suitable for framing.

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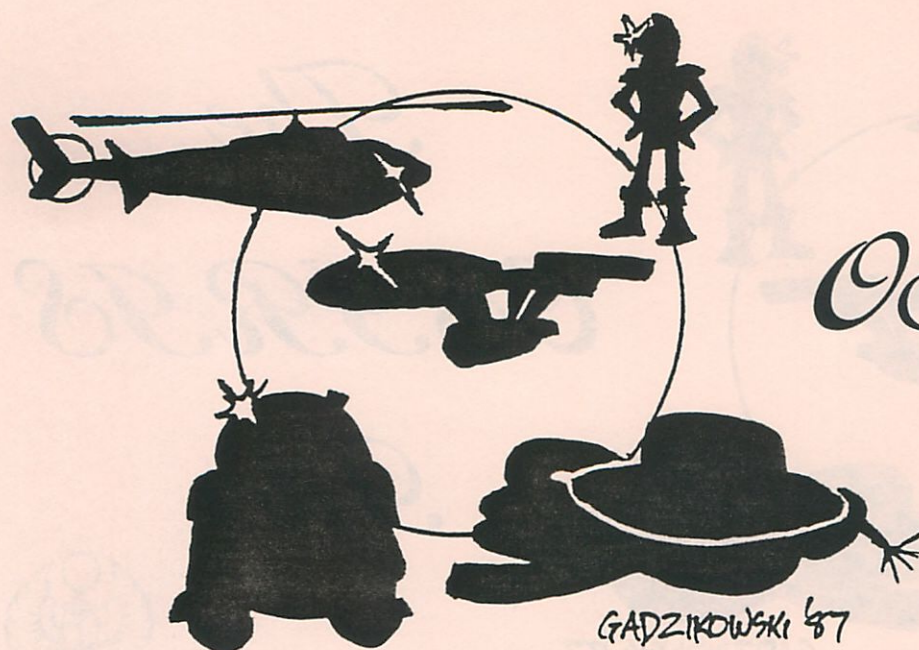
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We urge all those who want to see their work in print, who want to share their writing and art with others in fandom, to submit their efforts for our consideration. For additional information on submissions, please refer to the back of this flyer.

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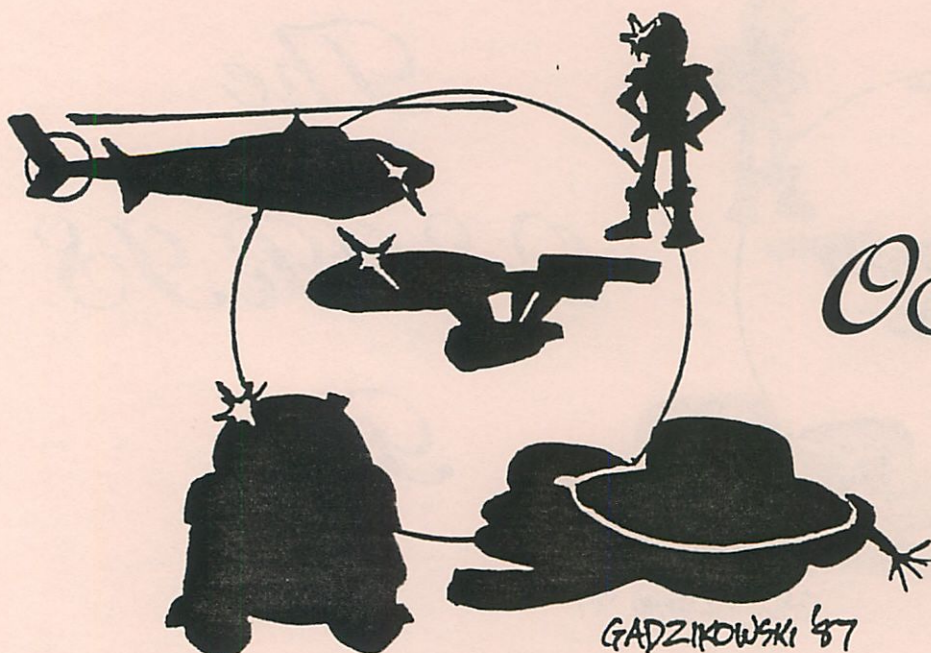
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The OSIRIS Files



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In our premiere issue, you will find an all-new AIRWOLF story, in which Stringfellow Hawke finds himself accused of a series of vicious political assassinations. He can't see a way out of the trap...

It's Christmas-time, and a little girl sees an "angel," when Ralph Hinckley files again as THE GREATEST AMERICAN HERO.

The scene shifts to the planet Sagittara, and the time to the night of the ill-fated Armistice with the Cylons. Workers hurry to put final touches on a new shuttle for the commander of the battlestar GALACTICA, only to find themselves in the middle of an invasion...

Last of the fiction offerings for this issue is "Survive the Alliance," our ultimate tribute to the multi-media story. The Visitors have invaded Earth, the Resistance has called for help -- and the Colonials and Cylons have both answered. While on reconnaissance, Apollo is shot down by a menacing something that resembles a marine mammal with a propeller beanie, and Starbuck is kidnapped by...a talking automobile? The Firm is called in to help investigate the wreckage of an alien spacecraft, and the A-Team joins the battle...

Also included in THE OSIRIS FILES #1 are eleven beautiful STAR TREK and STAR WARS portraits by Hugo-winner Joan Hanke-Woods. First done ten years ago, these portraits have never before been published. They are printed on fine linen stock, in a format suitable for framing, and can easily be removed from the zine.

So, welcome to THE OSIRIS FILES! To order this new zine, with more than 120 pages to delight you, send a check or money order for \$15.00, payable to Joy Harrison in U.S. dollars only, to:

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No. 2

Indiana Jones returns to Cairo for the first time since his university days, seeking a powerful long-lost amulet he doesn't really believe exists. There's no danger -- until he and Short Round stumble upon an ancient cult, and a particularly gruesome trap.

Thomas Magnum has been shot, and lies near death. In fact, he's already decided he's going to die, and has said farewell -- at least in his mind -- to all those he loves. Then he meets Judi, and nothing can ever be the same again.

Long before his fateful meeting with Lela of Alderaan, Han Solo is asked to rescue another princess. But, as he discovers, not all princesses are susceptible to his irresistible charms.

Walter Stock is a science fiction writer, and Walter Stock has a bad -- possibly fatal -- case of "writer's block." Varied and unrelated universes come together as he seeks a cure, and an idea for a new story.

What happened to his kitchen? A.J. Simon is pretty sure he knows, but he can't quite pin down the evidence in "The Great Chocolate Chip Cookie Caper."

Vincent and his beloved Catherine are torn apart when a conscientious police officer decides Vincent is a loose end in an unsolved homicide case. Can either of them survive, with the police investigating them, and a continent between them?

The Cylons are poised to attack Earth, and the Colonials of the battlestar GALACTICA must join with the reptilian Visitors and the Earth-based human Resistance if they are to have any chance of defeating their ancient foes. Meanwhile, Stringfellow Hawke, MacGyver, and Remington Steele join Michael Knight and the A-Team in an effort to stop the rebel Diana and her fellow renegades. But after the long mutual distrust, can they all possibly work together -- even if the prize is the survival of the planet they cherish? The conclusion of "Survive the Alliance" brings even more of the excitement, drama, and humor followers of this story have come to expect.

Also included in **THE OSIRIS FILES #2** is poetry by L.A. Carr, and magnificent art by Karen River, Gennie Summers, Toni Hardeman, Kate Soehnen, Joan Hanke-Woods/Mori, and others. All this -- 170 skillfully written and beautifully illustrated pages -- can be ordered by sending a check or money order for \$18.00, payable to Joy Harrison in U.S. dollars only, to:

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